MISS MINERVA
ON THE
OLD PLANTATION

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Aunt Cindy

Miss Minerva
on the
Old Plantation

BY

EMMA SPEED SAMPSON

Author of

"Billy and the Major", "Miss Minerva's Baby"

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Miss Minerva on the Old Plantation

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	Duty and Diet	11
II	Aunt Cindy Unbends	29
III	Miss Minerva Blooms	44
IV	A Flurry Over Germs	60
V	On the Road to Bliss	75
VI	William Green Hill at Home	89
VII	Frances Gives a Party	106
VIII	Mysteries of the Attic	128
IX	Jimmy Garner's Plot	152
X	Mr. Bonyman's Surprise	164
XI	Mr. Bonyman Rests in Peace	185
XII	Mrs. Hopkins Entertains	204
XIII	At the Old Haunted Tree	226
XIV	Uncle Jupiter's Escape	241
XV	Billy Sits in Judgment	257
XVI	On the Mississippi	275
XVII	Josephine's Pet Pig	288

Miss Minerva on the Old Plantation

CHAPTER I

DUTY AND DIET

ISS MINERVA'S friends sometimes wondered if she would have consented to marry the Major, had she realized what matrimony was to mean to her. As a spinster, her days moved by in well-ordered serenity. She had the respect of her neighbors, and was beloved by those who knew her best. She was her own mistress and there was no one to say what she must do, or how she should live.

Duty had been Miss Minerva's watch-word. To her, duty had usually meant

something more or less disagreeable. When her nephew, William Green Hill, had been left an orphan she had undertaken the care of him, solely because it was her duty — her disagreeable duty. She had sternly disciplined herself to the task and had entered on it with prayer and earnest resolve. That any pleasure might result from the possession of the little boy had never crossed her mind, except the satisfaction she experienced in doing what she felt was her duty.

Later on she had been able to persuade herself that marrying Major Joseph Estes was her duty, because she felt that her nephew should have the benefit of a masculine hand in his upbringing. The Major had slyly suggested to her that it was her duty to put an end to his long, untiring courtship and the magic word duty had worked the miracle.

With the entrance of these two masculine creatures into her hitherto Adamless Eden, duty had taken on an entirely new aspect to the bewildered Miss Minerva. The Major was constantly telling her it was her duty to do pleasant things, and Billy soon discovered that the way to persuade his aunt to do what he wanted her to do was first to convince her it was her duty and compliance was sure to follow.

When the Major and Billy joined forces against Miss Minerva in an argument she usually ended by giving in. If both of them, for instance, considered it her duty to let Billy go fishing with Tom Collins, instead of attending a missionary meeting with her, perhaps they were right. At any rate she could but trust in her Joseph's judgment.

Then had come the baby, the irrepressible Josephine, who discovered early in

life that her mother was easily influenced by judicious handling. She had an ingratiating way of approaching her mother with a phraseology all her own that Miss Minerva found hard to resist.

"If I's you, you ought to let me put on my blue sash and take me down to see Daddy to his office," the child would suggest, or:

"If I's you, you ought to 'suade Aunt Cindy to make some little bitser sugar cakes."

There it was again — another member of the family making the poor lady feel that it was her duty to do things that she would have frowned on in her spinster days. They never gave her to understand it was her duty to keep the stockings darned, or make them learn hymns, or turn her house inside out at stated periods for the general house cleaning. According

to her interesting family, such disagreeable things were not her duty at all. They even intimated that these items were her selfish pleasures. Her duty was to be ever ready to go on jaunts with them, and to encourage them in all their frivolities, even to the point of becoming frivolous herself.

Sometimes Miss Minerva feared she was becoming frivolous. Who but a frivolous woman would wear a hat turned up in front, with a perky blue wing placed at what Miss Minerva feared was a very saucy angle? Was it according to the staid and simple principles of her code that she should have taken so much pains with the cut of her winter suit? Was it right that she should have bought a winter suit at all, since her last year's one was still perfectly good, with not a break in it? Was not the blue of the cloth rather vivid for one whose boast was that she was superior

to the lure of clothes? To be sure, the Major was fond of blue and it was her duty to please her husband. Duty again!

Even Aunt Cindy, Miss Minerva's old cook, felt called upon to suggest to her mistress some things she considered duties.

"You done got yo'se'f one good man, Miss Minerva, an' you better do all you kin ter keep him. Good men folks is as skeerse as chicken teeth an' I 'low it's sho yo' duty ter holt on ter the Major. I ain't a meanin' the Major is the kin' ter browse. He done got too settled ter kick up monkey shines, but howsomever, it air sho yo' duty ter dress up all you kin an' fluff up yo' har an' even plump up some, so's you will kinder make out ter fill out yo' clothes a little mo' puffier.

"I ain't a sayin' it's yo' duty ter git sho 'nough stout, but jes' git a little mo' meat on yo' bones. Th' ain't nothin' like a

little meat ter level over the wrinkles, when folks begins ter git along in years."

Miss Minerva listened meekly to the old woman's admonitions and wrote secretly to a certain doctor, who was responsible for a syndicated letter concerning health and beauty which appeared in the daily paper, asking advice. The answer was: "Yeast! Eat yeast!"

She consulted Aunt Cindy as to her opinion concerning plain yeast cakes as a wholesome fattener.

"Lord love you, Miss Minerva, I reckon it mought swell you up some, same as the dough, but goodness sake, m'am, don't go eat too much 'cause you might be, ter say, hide boun' an' in that case you'll be liable ter bus' open 'thout stretchin' none. I think it would be saftes' ter grease yo'se'f, same as we does the dough, so's a crus' won't form while it's a risin'. I

hearn tell some folks is hide boun' like hosses an' it ain't safte ter try an' fatten 'em too hurried like."

"You won't mention this to anyone, will you, Aunt Cindy?" said Miss Minerva, anxiously.

"No'm, I ain't likely to. I got the feelin's of a 'ooman an' I ain't likely ter go back on one er my sect. I wisht you would fin' out what I ought ter do ter fall off 'bout fifty or a hun'erd pounds. I'd be right down proudified ter slim down befo' big meetin' time nex' August. I don't want ter git so slimified I'd have wattles a hangin' from my neck like a turkey gobbler, but I'd sho admire ter drap some er this here extry heftiness. When I looks over ter Mrs. Garner's an' sees that there two-legged mountain, Sarah Jane, a walkin' aroun' an' a callin' herse'f a 'ooman, it makes me right down 'shamed er my gen-

deration. I think it's my duty not ter git no stouter."

Miss Minerva wrote for directions concerning the reducing of Aunt Cindy. There was a prompt response. The old darky listened to the doctor's letter with earnest attention. She gave a deep chuckle of amusement.

"I's 'bleeged ter you, Miss Minerva, you an' that there writin' doctor, but I's skeered ter take sich a treatment as he subscribes. I mought lose my flesh by so doin' but I's likely ter lose my 'ligion 'long with them fifty or a hun'erd pounds. He says ter eat nothin' but skim milk. Humph! Tell me this, Miss Minerva, how's I gonter do my wuck, an' mo'n that see that Wilkes Booth Lincoln does his'n, on sech thin victuals 'thout no suption in 'em? Skim milk ain't nothin' but jes' a wash down fer dry eatin's. He mus' be a plumb fool to

arsk me ter set back an' slowly sip skim milk — half a glass ev'y two hours. If I swallowed it down all to oncet it mought

take a holt on my innards but jes' lettin' it trickle down wouldn't do no good at all. No'm, don't take away my victuals.

What else do he say, Miss Minerva?

"Tu'n three somersets in the baid ev'y mornin' befo' breakfast! Why, Miss Minerva, that there man mus' be some kind er lumatic! If I tu'ned jes' one somerset on my baid they wouldn't be no baid lef' for the nex' try an' they wouldn't be no breakfast, unless'n you made out ter cook it. He mus' a took me fer some kinder freak out'n a circus."

Miss Minerva smiled and continued reading, but Aunt Cindy interrupted scornfully:

"Roll on the flo'! I'd have to lose what 'ligion I's done got an' git ter wuck an' git it agin ter do sich a thing as that. I ain't never been one er them Holy Rollers, but I mought make out ter be fer my fawm's sake. How many rolls mus' I make?"

"The doctor says roll across the floor and back three times every morning."

"Humph! That there doctor mus' a been a baker befo' he tuck up bein' a writin' doctor, what with his yeas' an' turnovers an' rolls an' sich," chuckled Aunt Cindy. "You eat the yeas' an' I'll put down the rolls, Miss Minerva, an' between us we'll see what'll happen. If the rollin' don' kill me I mought let up a leetle on sorghum an' drippin's, but I ain't likely ter git so low as skim milk an' them turnovers in the shape er somersets. Didn't he give you no directions but jes' yeas'? It looks like gittin' thin is mo' wearin' than gittin' fat."

"Well, yes, he did suggest the same exercises to me that he prescribed for you," confessed the mistress. "I am to begin tomorrow morning. I think the guest chamber would be the better place for me," said Miss Minerva.

"Somersets an' all?"

"Yes, I think I'll try everything he recommends."

"Well then, I reckon I'll put some extry props under my baid an' try the turnovers too," said Aunt Cindy ruefully. "I ain't a gonter be outdid by any 'ooman, white or black. I'm gonter let up on the victuals, too, beginning this very night."

Wilkes Booth Lincoln occupied a cot in the corner of Aunt Cindy's room. The old woman was in truth fond of the little boy but, as is often the way with colored women, she seldom spoke a gentle word to the young of her own race. She was ever kind and loving to Billy and Josephine but seemed to think that she was not doing her full duty to her charge unless she spent every moment in which they were alone in her room in criticising and correcting the gentle, sweet-tempered little Wilkes Booth Lincoln.

Fortunately for his peace of mind, the boy had a saving sense of humor and an insight into human nature. Had Aunt Cindy realized the quiet fun the boy derived from her scoldings, no doubt she would have made good some of the dire threats it was her wont to voice, but he kept his laugh to himself and thereby saved his hide.

Wilkes Booth Lincoln had noticed that Aunt Cindy had eaten very sparingly at supper.

"Is you sick, Aunt Cindy?"

"No, I ain't sick," crossly.

"Ain't you hongry?"

"Yes, I's hongry!" said Aunt Cindy, with a heavy sigh.

"Then why don't you eat some er this here Sally Lum? It air pow'ful tasty."

"Did you ever hear tell er that man what got rich a tendin' ter his own busi-

ness?" snapped the old woman. The boy gravely regarded his heaped plate.

"Here, take my sheer er Sally Lum," commanded Aunt Cindy. "'Tain't fitten ter be het up an' it's bad luck ter tho' away braid." She was slowly sipping milk from a cup as she spoke.

"I's fitten fer ter bus' already, Aunt Cindy, but I's real obleeged ter you."

"Eat it! Eat it!" sternly commanded his mentor. "I ain't a gonter have you a wastin' the Major's victuals."

"I'll do my bes' but, Aunt Cindy, I reckon eatin' it won't save it."

"None er yo' sass, you lim' er Satan! You stop a stuffin' yo'se'f there like a pig jes' befo' hawg killin' time an' git up an' go split yo' kindlin' an' carry in yo' coal an' — "

"I done it."

"Well, split some mo' and carry in

some extry. You's too nimble-come-trimble here lately, a doin' yo' wuck befo' I gits time ter tell you to."

"Ya-as'm," drawled Wilkes Booth Lincoln, trying to hide the twinkle in his eye.

"What you larfin' at? Don't you dar' larf at me when here I am starvin' myse'f to skin-an'-bone, so's you kin git fed up. Go!"

The boy went and went in a hurry. Aunt Cindy was plainly in a bad humor about something. Discretion being the better part of valor, he split more kindling and carried up more coal and hurried off to Aunt Cindy's house in the back yard to study his lessons and get to bed as quickly as possible.

"Can't you stop a while and play a game of checkers?" asked Billy, whose affection for his little colored playmate was as strong as ever and who felt some-

thing was lacking in the day that did not bring them together.

"Hush, Billy! Don't say a word," cautioned the wary Wilkes Booth Lincoln. "Aunt Cindy is on the rampage. I don't know what's the matter, but I reckon I'd better git under the kivers fast as I kin."

"Aunt Minerva is kinder actin' up strange too," said Billy. "If I didn't know all about how strict she is, I'd most say she'd been drinking. She's got the funniest smell — kind of like that home-brew beer Mr. Garner's been making and, geewhilikins, she ate a lot o' supper, not like she enjoyed it but she tucked away a powerful feed — potatoes and butter mostly. Now you know Aunt Minerva never was a great hand at potatoes and she always was kind of stingy with the butter. But do you know, Nicky, I caught her buttering her fried potatoes?"

"Well, the same thing ain't the matter with both of 'em," declared Wilkes Booth Lincoln, "'cause Aunt Cindy never et a mouthful of supper — jes' sat back sippin' milk."

"You never can tell about women," says Billy sagely. "Both of them might be coming down with the same disease."

CHAPTER II

AUNT CINDY UNBENDS

WILKES BOOTH LINCOLN studied his lessons with what Aunt Cindy called "a lick and a promise" and quickly crawled into his cot, pulling the quilt up over his head, hoping thereby to avoid any further lectures from his stern room-mate.

Aunt Cindy moved ponderously around the room, putting it to rights as was her wont before retiring. She had a disconcerting way of talking to herself and Wilkes Booth Lincoln never could tell whether her remarks were addressed to him or to her alter ego. If he happened to be the addressee, woe be to him if he failed to respond; but on the other hand, if she happened to be talking to herself, more

woe was in store for him if he interrupted the conversation.

It was not bodily violence the boy feared — only threats, dark and bloody, of what would happen to him if it were not for the white folks. Wilkes Booth Lincoln was a born pacifist. He dreaded a row of any sort and more than anything in the world he dreaded the sight of Aunt Cindy, standing over his cot in her huge canton flannel nightgown with uncorseted figure and unbridled tongue. Her flow of language seemed to the boy to come more freely when she discarded her stays.

There had been a time when the old woman had seemed like an angel to him, yellow flannel nightgown and all, but that was when he had pneumonia and she had nursed him faithfully, night and day, with a sweetness and gentleness that she usually reserved for Billy and Josephine.

Wilkes Booth Lincoln understood thoroughly that Aunt Cindy's manner and heart were two different things but he also knew that he came in for more manner than heart because of his color. That night he prayed sincerely for peace and quiet.

Aunt Cindy settled herself in her best rocking chair and there was an ominous silence. The boy breathed heavily and simulated sleep.

"Skim milk!" muttered Aunt Cindy.

That remark could not be meant for him. He felt safe in ignoring it. More heavy breathing!

"Skin-an'-bone!"

That might be meant for him. He devoutly hoped not. Anyhow he determined to ignore it and went on with his simulation of slumber. He heard the dropping of first one shoe and then the other, the creaking and snapping of loosened stays.

Now he was sure the yellow flannel night-gown was donned and no doubt Aunt Cindy would soon be safely sunk in her billowy feather bed. But no!

"Empty as a drum!" was her next remark.

"She mought mean my haid," thought Wilkes Booth Lincoln. "She all time sayin' I'm that away; but I'm gonter lay low." He accordingly breathed more heavily.

"Stop yo' growlin'!" in a tone stern and commanding.

The boy stopped breathing and trembled instead.

"Stop yo' growlin'! Can't you hear me? It looks like I can't git no peace from you. If I kin put up with this here doin's, it looks like you ain't called on ter grumble. Stop yo' growlin', I say!"

The boy lay like a bronze figure. He

even ceased trembling, so great was his trepidation.

"Stop it, I say! Stop yo' growlin' this minute!" The voice was so full of wrath and determination he decided he had better wake up and answer.

"I ain't a growlin', Aunt Cindy. I'm jes' a sleepin'.

"Lawsamussy!" Aunt Cindy arose in her might and padded softly to the boy's bedside.

He felt like Job, that "the thing which he so greatly feared had come upon him." She pulled the quilt from around his shoulders and towered over him in her mighty wrath.

"Ain't you sleep yit? Ain't I never ter git no peace an' quiet? Can't a lady talk ter her own stummick 'thout some black lim' er Satan a buttin' in on her conversation? If it wa'n't fer the love I bear

the good Lord, I'd bus' you clean open! Yes, bus' you open an' cut out yo' lights an' livers an' chew up yo' heart an' spit it out! 'Tain't nothin' but me bein' a pro-

fessin' Christian 'ooman, long with the Major's tomfool notions 'bout niggers bein' pretty nigh as good as white folks, that holds me back. Now if you ain't 'sleep

by the time I gits in the baid I'll — I'll — " But there was no use in her declaring what she would do, the boy covered his head up again and went calmly to sleep.

The next morning, immediately after breakfast, Wilkes Booth Lincoln made a sign to Billy to follow him. By his mysterious expression Billy knew full well that something important was to be imparted.

" Stable! " whispered the little colored boy. " Stable! Ain't no women folks liable ter follow. Air you got a minute ter spare, Billy? "

" Sure! 'Tain't nowhere near school time. What's up? "

" Billy, don't you reckon Miss Minerva would 'low me ter sleep up over the wood house after this? I's plum skeered ter sleep in Aunt Cindy's room no mo'."

" Scared of Aunt Cindy! Why, Nicky,

you are foolish! You know Aunt Cindy don't mean anything when she fusses at you. Aunt Cindy wouldn't hurt anything. When she catches a flea she's mo'n apt to turn it loose 'thout cracking it," declared the loyal Billy.

"I ain't skeered er the way Aunt Cindy used ter be, but the way she is now. I's a thinkin' she done gone crazy. I 'lowed las' night she wa' sick 'cause she never et no supper an' she wa' so camtankerous. After we went over to her room she got to talkin' ter herself something scan'lous — leastways it wa'n't 'zactly herself but her stummick. But it wa'n't las' night what got me a goin' so. Billy, this mornin' she acted up so I pretty nigh trimbled through the tick."

"What did she do?"

"Well, you know Aunt Cindy is a powerful early riser. Mos' times I keep

on a sleepin', but whether I's sleepin' or wakin', I allus lays low 'cause the minute I is woken Aunt Cindy begins ter hunt trouble fer me in the shape er wuck. This mornin' she was up an' doin' 'bout day break. She didn't dress herself though — no, sir! She got busy a pilin' fire wood up under the cornders of her baid an' then, Billy, as sho as I's black an' you's white, that ol' 'ooman put her haid down in the feather baid an' turned a somerset as pretty as a trick dog. She went plum over an' come down kerbang on tother side er the baid, but she miscalculated some an' lit on the flo'. She sot there a smilin' kinder like ol' Rover down on the plantation when they cotched him a stealin' sheep."

"Gee! I wish I could have seen her," cried Billy. "What did you do?"

"Me! I laid as low as a snake's hips. Feathers was flyin' like goose pickin' time.

A seam in the tick done busted open, 'cause er Aunt Cindy treatin' it so rough, an' it looked mos' like a snow storm."

"Golly! It sounds like the movies."

"Then what you reckon she done did? She lay out on the flo' an' begun a rollin' like a hawgshead er terbacker with a bunch o' roustabouts a pushin' it down the gang-plank. Back an' fo'th she rolled, clean over to the stove an' back under the baid, kicking over the wood she done piled up at the cornders. The mo' she rolled the mo' she sweated an' the feathers stuck ter her same as if she had er been tarred. I tell you, Billy, po' Aunt Cindy looked like some chicken.

"When she done rolled back an' fo'th some three four times, she sot up an' groaned out loud. She must of had a stummick ache. Anyhow she pulled herself up off'n the flo' an' the fust thing she

did was to take the wood piles from under her baid an' stack 'em back by the hearth. She ain't knowed about the feathers until then, 'cause it looks like she wa' kinder dazed. Then she began a pickin' 'em off'n her pusson an' a sneezin' ter beat the ban'. She sprinkled the cyarpet with water an' swept' it up an' dumped all the mess in the stove.

"Billy, the smell wa' something turrible. I wa' skeered ter death I mought git ter sneezin', 'cause burnt feathers'll make the Angel Gabrul sneeze, so my gran'-mammy says. I wa' skeert ter let the sneeze out, 'cause er Aunt Cindy, an' I wa' skeert ter holt it in, 'cause I done hearn tell one time a man busted clean open when he helt in a sneeze. I crope down low under the kivers an' when the sneeze come it so happened Aunt Cindy had her back turned an' didn't hear it."

Billy laughed and urged his friend to proceed with the tragic story. So Wilkes Booth Lincoln concluded:

"Well, at last Aunt Cindy done sew up her tick an' straightened up the room an' dress herself. Then she come over an' said kinder sof' like, 'Time ter wake up, chile. I done let you sleep late this mawnin' 'cause you done so much wuck las' night th'ain't nothin' lef ter do now.' Anybody mought er thought I wa' white the way she woken me up. I never let on 'bout me seein' all her crazy goin's on."

"Do you know, Nicky, I think Aunt Minerva is acting awful peculiar, too? She's still got that smell like home-brew beer. She must be keeping her bottle in the comp'ny room, because I saw her coming out of there early this morning. She looked kind of startled when she met me in the hall and her neck's got a crick in

it. Do you reckon she could have the same trouble as Aunt Cindy?"

"I don' know, Billy. Women folks is strange critters. I do hope Miss Minerva won't make no mind if I takes ter sleepin' in the wood house attic."

"We'll see about it," comforted Billy. "If she objects, there's always the Major, you know."

There was a hurried hunting of caps and collecting of books and the boys hastened on their way to their respective schools, Billy whistling shrilly for Jimmy Garner, his next door neighbor, to join him.

"Well?" questioned Miss Minerva, as she entered the kitchen to confer with Aunt Cindy after the boys were safely out of the way.

"Don't say a word, Miss Minerva. If I wa'n't black already I'd be black an'

blue 'count of all I done gone through with. The onlies' thing that is fell off is two-three hun'erd poun's done fell off'n the baid."

The old woman chuckled in remembrance of the mishap. "I wa' sho I wa' kilt but I wa' game ter go on an' I outrolled the Holy Rollers. I ain't ter say been down flat on the flo' sence I wa' a baby. Gittin' down wa'n't so hard 'case I stayed down when I somersetted out'n the baid, but it wa' gittin' up that took all my 'ligion. I 'membered 'bout faith removin' mountains an' it come ter me faith mought lif' me up off'n the flo'. It did — that 'long with me a ketchin' holt er the foot bo'd an' tuggin' away. How 'bout you, Miss Minerva? Is you done did all you 'lowed you would?"

"Yes, Aunt Cindy," blushed Miss Minerva. "It was very trying and seemed

kind of disreputable, but I retired to the guest chamber and went through all the exercises prescribed. I have a slight crick in my neck in consequence of the — the — somersaults."

"Lawsamussy, Miss Minerva, I kin iron that out in no time. Air you a gonter keep on with the subscription?"

"Yes indeed! Having put my hand to the plough — "

"I know, Missy. Ain't it the truf? But somehow I feel mo' like I done put my han' ter the harrow. Well, I reckon I'll keep a goin' too then. I ain't one ter give up. But, Miss Minerva, 'tain't so ter say col' weather now, so don't you think that there Wilkes Booth Lincoln mought remove his domercile ter the wood house attic? Somehow I don't like ter exercise befo' boy or man."

CHAPTER III

MISS MINERVA BLOOMS

ISS MINERVA was certainly taking on weight. She faithfully consumed three daily doses of y e a s t and went through with the prescribed exercises. Whatever that lady began she finished. It may have been the yeast that was doing it; it may have been the rolling — Nature defending herself by padding the surfaces so ruthlessly exposed to the terrors of sharp rockers and corners of furniture — or it may have been the forcing down of more than the usual quantity of potato and butter.

Whatever the cause, the effect was indisputable. Miss Minerva was getting

plump. The change was so gradual that the person whom it most concerned, Miss Minerva herself, was the last to realize it. The Major had been conscious of the fact for several weeks, but had kept silent on the all important subject. He watched the process like one sitting entranced, gazing at the blooming of a rare plant.

It was becoming to Miss Minerva to have her sharp corners rounded off and to fill out her clothes a little more "puffier," as Aunt Cindy had expressed it. Her spiritual contours were becoming a bit softer, too, although that was due not to the yeast cakes but to the leaven of the Major's genial nature and the trust and love felt for her by her nephew, Billy, and the sprite, Josephine.

On the other hand, Aunt Cindy seemed to get fatter and fatter. The more she rolled the more fitted she became for the

motion and the somersaults seemed to make her just that much rounder.

"They useter be a sideways ter me," she grumbled, "but the mo' I gyrates the wuss it is. It looks like now I ain't got no sideways an' no lengthways. If it wa'n't fer my haid I wouldn't know whichaways I was. I'll give it to that there writin' doctor, though. I is sho supple from all this elastics he done subscribed. Co'se I ain't stuck ter the skim milk foolishness an' I mus' give out that all them mawnin' genuflutin's makes me so hongry I eats mo' breakfas' than I ever useter.

"I kinder mistrus'ed that writin' doctor whin he writ Miss Minerva ter do the same thing he writ me ter do. If rollin' 'roun' on the flo' air a gonter make a thin 'ooman fat, how in the name er goodness air it gonter make a fat 'ooman thin? Co'se I knows you air gotter knead the dough

ter make it rise an' I reckon that's why Miss Minerva air called on ter tumble an' roll so much. I's beginnin' ter 'low p'raps I air already got too much yeas' in me an' the more I knead it the mo' it rises an' that's howcome I's swellin' up so. I'll keep on a while though, 'ca'se I done got so used ter cuttin' up jack in the mawnin', looks like I'd miss it if I quit."

A project had been in the minds of Billy and the Major for some months and through them the seed of desire had been planted in the heart of little Josephine, and that was to go spend several months down on the river plantation owned by Billy. Aunt Cindy wanted to go and Wilkes Booth Lincoln wanted to go. The only person in the family who did not want to leave the comfortable town house and go to spend the summer in a great, old mansion that had not been lived in for

many years, was the mistress, Miss Minerva.

The family understood that a plan must not be presented too hurriedly to that lady. The idea must be suggested and then the ground prepared, as it were, for the crop and then after the planting, which it was well to do surreptitiously and in the dark, with subterfuge and pretext of doing anything but sowing the seed of change, the tender plant must be watered and guarded with care and cleverness and the harvest would be ready to gather before Miss Minerva would quite realize what was being done to her.

The desire to return for a time to his ancestral home had been strong in the heart of Billy for many months. He was contented to live with his aunt, especially since the Major had married into the family, thereby changing Miss Minerva's prim

and placid manner of living as only the masculine element can.

The advent of Josephine had made existence as Miss Minerva's little boy much more endurable. Miss Minerva was content to have her nephew really be a boy when her own baby turned out to be a girl. Content as he was, the longing for his old home would sometimes take possession of Billy with a poignancy impossible to ignore.

Finally he had said to the Major: "Don't you reckon I might go back to the plantation for a little while? I like it up here with you and Aunt Minerva — like it a whole lot — but sometimes the smell of things down yonder, the pines and sycamores in the river bottom, and catfish frying in the cabins, kinder comes back to me and it seems like I can't stand it any longer not to be there. I wake up in

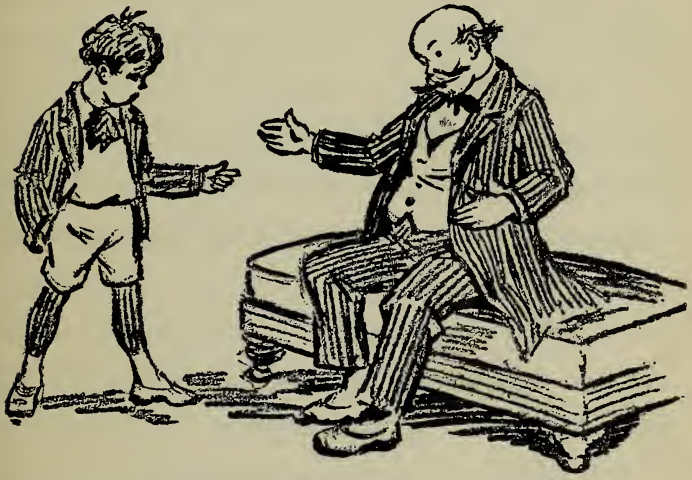
the night and think I hear the steamboat a blowin' as it comes 'round the bend, with the water splashin' as the stern wheel churns it up to make a landin'. There's something 'bout the plantation that kinder owns me. I feel, somehow, it must miss me kinder like I miss it."

To the Major had been given a genius for understanding children and he fully appreciated Billy's longing for his old home. He had promised then and there to see to it that Billy got back sometime. He had rather fixed on the following summer as a good time for all of the family to make a visit to the plantation.

"I have never known an overseer that did not need overseeing at one time or another," he had declared. The only difficulty lay in persuading his wife that the plan was a good one.

"We had better lie low," the Major

cautioned Billy. "Josephine has already pushed the matter a little too far by begging her mother to have that little colored girl, Decimus Ultimus, come to town to



live with her and, if not that, for all of us to go down there. The child is very persistent, when once she starts, and it is diamond cut diamond when your Aunt Minerva and your Cousin Josephine get together."

Billy laughed. It was delightful to the boy to have the Major treat him as though he had reached years of discretion. The secret of the Major's success with children was that he always made them feel either that he belonged to their generation or they to his. One of the bonds between the old man and the little boy was that they prided themselves that they thoroughly understood the opposite sex — that sex embracing principally Miss Minerva, Miss Minerva's baby and Aunt Cindy. They loved them all, in spite of knowing full well all their prejudices and peculiarities.

"We'll have to think up a way," mused Billy. "Aunt Cindy says to get the doctor to prescribe it for Josephine, but I don't believe we could, because Jo's cheeks are too rosy for any such plan. Besides, the doctor always says our town is the healthiest place anywhere around — so

healthy he can hardly make a living. If we go we can take Jimmy, can't we?"

"Certainly, we must take Mr. Garner," said the Major. The Major always called Jimmy Mr. Garner. This had caused much discomfiture to Jimmy at first, but he had decided the Major was too valuable an asset to Billy and his friends to let a little teasing stand in the way of liking the generous gentleman who was always giving treats and planning visits to circuses and movies.

"Me'n Wilkes Booth Lincoln have been knowing all about the plantation ever since we were born," went on Billy, "but Jimmy ain't never been on that kind of place. He'd sho like it a lot. I reckon Jo'll about go crazy over all the good times down there. If we can just get Aunt Minerva started somehow. I wisht she would take a notion to go and get it in her

head she's the one who thought of it first."

"Too much luck!" laughed the Major, "but maybe it will come our way somehow, Billy."

One afternoon late in May Billy and Jimmy were returning from Tom Collins's, where they had gone to view six new baby guinea pigs that had recently been added to Tom's overcrowded hutch. The boys were driving Brownie, hitched to the diminutive pony cart.

"Looks like you ought to let me drive some," suggested Jimmy. "You all time driving yourself. I'm one of the best drivers in town. I pretty near hit more things I don't hit than anybody."

"All right, drive if you want to," laughed Billy. "Brownie is so poky it ain't much fun to drive him these days. What you turning down thisaway for?" he asked when Jimmy had the reins.

"I never turned at all. This old fool Brownie just turned himself. Brownie all time thinks he knows mor'n anybody about whichaway to go. It's a good thing I did make him come thisaway though, because we ain't seen those new houses since they were finished," added Jimmy as they approached a row of houses that had recently been completed.

The houses were a new type for the town. They were known as double tenements and were designed for two families.

"Did you hear Tom say he was going to sell his guinea pigs to a doctor who was going to 'speriment with them?" asked Billy. "I hate to think about it."

"Shoo! That ain't nothing. Doctors are all time giving diseases to guinea pigs and letting them give 'em to folks so's they can get a living. My father read in the paper 'bout a man that gave cholera to a

whole trap full of rats and then let 'em get out."

"But he didn't mean to."

"That's nothing, he did it all the same. I reckon lots of doctors don't mean to. I hope none of them will let out some guinea pigs with diphtheria or mumps."

"Oh, I ain't thinking about such a thing happening," declared Billy.

The boys leaned out of the cart and looked curiously at the new houses.

"I don't see what anybody wants to live in the house with anybody else for," said Billy. "I'd ruther to live in a big house like the plantation than any little cooped up flat house like these."

"My mother says it's all the style to live in 'partments," said Jimmy. "She's all time begging my father to sell out an' live in 'partments. I'd like to see Sarah Jane get herself into a 'partment. Father

says you are all time catching other folks' diseases in 'partments; an' smellin' other folks' cabbage."

"What's all those little red signs tacked on those houses?" asked Billy. "There's one on almost every house and two on some."

"Geewhilikins! Billy, those are diphtheria signs. I can most read 'em. I reckon Tom Collins's guinea pigs have got loose." Jimmy was all excitement.

"But he hasn't sold them yet—"

"That don't make no difference to germs. I heard a lady telling my mother that germs are so 'maginary that they can travel faster than anything but thought. Now ain't we been a thinkin' an' a thinkin' 'bout germs an' Tom Collins's guinea pigs an' ain't my father been a thinkin' 'bout 'partment houses an' germs an' here we come a ridin' by an' there the little tickets

are tacked on the houses sayin' diphtheria has come."

"Let's stop and see," suggested Billy. "I can't read so far off."

"Stop and read! Gee, Billy, you are foolish. What you reckon the germs would be a doing while we are stoppin'? I can read the first letter from here. Look, it is a big D." Jimmy applied the whip to Brownie, who lunged forward, accelerating his sedate pace for a few yards. "Can't you see the big D?"

"Ye—es! I believe I can. But I don't believe—"

"It don't make no difference what you believe, I ain't a gonter hang around here and catch diphtheria an' take it home to my mother an' maybe my father an' poor little Bennie Dick. Diphtheria goes mighty hard with little children."

"Oh, Jimmy, s'pose little Jo would

catch it," gasped Billy. "I'd rather have it all over me and die than have little Jo catch it."

"Well then whip up yo' old fat pony an' let's make tracks out of this neighborhood," commanded Jimmy.

Billy grasped the reins and with a masterly cluck and a few sharp lashes on Brownie's flanks, unaccustomed to anything more than an occasional flick, they drove towards home at a brisk gait.

CHAPTER IV

A FLURRY OVER GERMS

HAT'S your hurry, Billy?" asked the Major as the boys drew rein before the porch where Miss Minerva, the Major and Josephine were sitting.

"Hurry enough!" answered Jimmy, ever ready to speak up. "Billy and I have been running away from germs — diphtheria germs. I reckon we've beat 'em but we sho had to hurry."

"Diphtheria!" gasped Miss Minerva, catching her precious Josephine to her breast. "What do you mean?"

"Well, that new street out towards Tom Collins's is broke out with diphtheria. Me'n Billy were driving through when we saw all the signs. Pretty near every house

has got up the placard. Some of 'em have got up two. I tell you we just tore home because we didn't want to bring back germs to Josephine and poor little Bennie Dick. You see Bennie Dick is pretty near the only thing Sarah Jane's got. Billy and I are the fastes' drivers in town when we gets in a hurry. We just made Brownie fly along."

"Don't come in here! Don't come in here!" cried the frantic mother. "Go right home, Jimmy, and take a hot bath and gargle your throat with listerine. You go in the back way, Billy, and go up stairs and do the same thing. You may have picked up a germ."

"Germ nothing!" muttered Jimmy, as he ambled home. "Miss Minerva Major's all time thinking folks have got germs. I ain't a gonter take no bath. I might wash my face, but not my ears. I reckon I'll

gargle though. I don't mind that much."

Billy obediently went through with the whole germicide performance, but as Jimmy said, Josephine was his own dear cousin while Bennie Dick was, after all, no kin and Sarah Jane did have a few other children somewhere or other, while Josephine was Miss Minerva's only baby.

"Joseph, Joseph, what shall I do?" wailed Miss Minerva, holding Josephine close to her fluttering heart. "If Josephine catches this terrible disease — I — I —."

"But, my dear, it must be on the outskirts of town. There is really no danger," comforted the Major.

"There is, there is! I think we should leave town before it spreads."

"Leave town! But where could we go?" asked the Major.

"We might go down on the plantation. The children would enjoy it and if I felt

my darling was safe I could put up with all the discomforts of the place. How soon could we go?"

"To-morrow, if that would not be too soon for you, my dear," said the Major solemnly, "but I really believe you are running away from an idea, Minerva."

"I can't help it. I must do everything to save the children. Would my darling like to go down on the plantation for the summer?" she asked Josephine.

"Like it! Oh, Minerva, what a precious mother you are. You think more of little children than you do of yourself, don't you?" Josephine's eyes were big with love.

The news spread like wildfire that Major and Mrs. Joseph Estes were going away — running away in fact. The neighbors had not heard that diphtheria had broken out in the suburbs but evil tidings take hold

of a community with surprising rapidity. Jimmy had seen to it that the children living near them were quickly informed of the adventure he and Billy had encountered.

"Me'n Billy is the smartest boys anywhere around," he boasted. "As soon as I saw the signs I up an' made Billy whip up his ol' slow coach of a pony an' we just came home a whoopin'. Germs were just a flyin' around. You could mos' see 'em. Sometimes you could see 'em."

"What'd they look like?" asked Frances Black, who was ever ready to make Jimmy prove a statement.

"Like — like — like germs, you goose! What'd you think they looked like?" retorted Billy defiantly.

"Larroes to catch medloes, maybe!"

"You all the time so smart, Frances," retorted Jimmy, testily.

"Yes? I am sorry I can't return the compliment, Mr. Garner."

"I hope I'm not going to catch diphtheria," said Lina Hamilton, clutching her slender white throat with both hands. "I've got a kind of contagious throat."

"You're sure to get it then," comforted Jimmy. "I ain't a gonter get it though, because I'm a going off to the plantation with Billy. He just 'vited me. My mamma's busy patching my pants now and gettin' my duds in order."

"That will be right nice," commented Frances, trying to keep out of her voice the note of envy.

"I wish Miss Minerva Major would ask us," sighed Lina. "Here comes Josephine now. Hello, Josephine, we are certainly going to miss you, honey. I reckon when you get back we'll be dead of diphtheria, Frances and me. You can water

our graves with your tears, darling. We are sure to catch germs."

"You won't worry about us any, though," put in Frances. "You'll be having such a grand time down on the plantation, that what happens to Lina and me won't make a mite of difference to you."

"Oh, yes it will!" cried Josephine, her eyes full of tears at the thought. "I ain't a gonter leave you, Lina an' Frances, because my mother thinks more of little children than she does of herself. I'm gonter 'vite you to come go too. Billy says the plantation has most twenty rooms, an' you don't never have to clean up but jes' move to the next room. You can come too. You are 'vited."

"Goody! Goody!" exclaimed the two older girls, jumping up and down with delight. "How lovely of Miss Minerva Major!"

"I'm going to tell my mother right off," said Frances, "so she can get me ready."

"Me too!" cried Lina. "My mother is crying because she is so sure I'll die of diphtheria. She'll be so happy."

In a few moments Miss Minerva's telephone was ringing madly. First Mrs. Black was on the line.

"Oh, Miss Minerva! I can't tell you how lovely I think it is of you. My child is in the seventh heaven of delight. What kind of clothes will she need? When do you start? Of course the plainest old clothes will be appropriate," the lady rattled on, little heeding the bewildered exclamations at the other end.

"Well I won't keep you, I know you are busy, but I just had to let you know what an angel I think you are."

Miss Minerva sank down in a chair, a startled look on her face. In a moment the

bell tingled again. This time it was Mrs. Hamilton.

"Dear Miss Minerva, I can't express my gratitude that you should have thought of my little Lina at this trying time when all mothers' hearts are filled with dread. Of course she will go. She is so happy at the prospect. I'll have her ready. God will reward you, dear Miss Minerva!" And Mrs. Hamilton "hung up."

"Such an imposition! I do not intend to put up with it!" gasped Miss Minerva, replacing the receiver. "God reward me indeed! It is bad enough to have to take that Jimmy Garner without having to include the whole neighborhood. Suppose —" but just then the Major came in and she poured out her woes and indignation to him.

"Well, well! I can't see that it is so bad as all that," he soothed. "The little girls are nice children and they will enjoy

the outing as much as any of us. I'm real glad they think they are invited, because the children certainly play very happily together, barring a clash now and then.

Ahem!" The Major paused a moment. "Minerva, my dear, I find, after all, there is no diphtheria in town."

"No diphtheria in town! Absurd! You

just don't want to leave for the country. I'd hate to go without you, Joseph, but my child's life is in jeopardy. Of course I'll be glad even to have the care of those other children, if it means saving their lives."

Miss Minerva was busily engaged in turning out bureau drawers and sorting the contents preliminary to packing.

"But, my dear, I am in earnest. There is no diphtheria in the town. I have seen the health officer, who declared none had been reported. I then took him in my buggy out to the street where Jimmy and Billy thought they saw the diphtheria signs —"

"Oh, Joseph! How could you? Don't you touch Josephine until you have thoroughly disinfected yourself!"

"But, my dear —"

"Don't my dear me and don't touch me!

I'm not afraid for myself but my baby might — "

The Major tried not to laugh, but his wife's excited fears were too much for him.

"I won't touch you, but please listen to me," he cried sinking in a chair while he shook with merriment. "The boys made a mistake. The signs are merely for rent signs: 'Double Tenements For Rent.' The D is a little larger than the other letters and printed in very black ink. It was the big D that misled them. You really need not be uneasy at all. You need not go to the plantation either, unless you want to."

"Oh, but I'd be too uneasy about little Josephine if I kept her in town. You may be mistaken."

"So I may," conceded the Major.

"I think we had better not change our plans, but get off to the country as soon as possible," urged Miss Minerva.

"Just as you choose, my dear!"

"And, Joseph — would you mind disinfecting yourself before you see Josephine?"

"But, Minerva, don't you understand? It is all a mistake."

"Yes, I know, Joseph. You think it is a mistake, but one never can tell about diphtheria germs. I don't want to seem foolish but I'd be much easier in my mind if you disinfect before you kiss Josephine."

"Certainly!" agreed the gallant Major. "Must I come to a boil or will a good bath and a complete change of linen be all that is necessary?"

"I fancy a bath will be sufficient," said Miss Minerva solemnly.

"I should think that would do for imaginary germs," chuckled the obedient husband and father. "I believe real germs must be well cooked to do any good."

With the Major's disinfection promised,

Miss Minerva returned to the matter of the invitation to Frances and Lina. Duty, as ever, in mind, she felt that Josephine deserved to be severely reprimanded, if not punished, for extending a promiscuous invitation to the neighbors to share in the delights of plantation life, without asking permission of her parents. The Major thought it would be better to let the matter rest, since they had decided to take Lina and Frances. He urged that the little girls might find out they were not really invited and be made uncomfortable by the knowledge.

"But Josephine should be made to understand she cannot do such things," insisted Miss Minerva. "Even at the risk of offending the neighbors I feel I must not let such an offense go unpunished."

Josephine, however, took matters in her own hands and, as usual, completely dis-

armed her mother. She came running into the room her eyes shining and her hair fluffier than usual.

"Minerva, I done took you at your word and asked Lina and Frances to go down on Billy's plantation with us. They's pretty near crazy, they's so happy, because they was scairt to death of catching diphtheria."

"My word! What word?" asked Miss Minerva, severely.

"Your word about thinking more about little children than you do about yourself. You 'member what you said? Leastways, I said it and you never comprerdicted me. Me'n Lina and Frances and all of us think you's the bestes' lady anywhere."

Miss Minerva smiled and stopped packing long enough to clasp her little daughter to her heart for a moment, while the Major beamed happily on his devoted wife.

CHAPTER V

ON THE ROAD TO BLISS

HE accommodating accommodation train that carried Miss Minerva and her strangely assorted party from their home town to the little station nearest to Billy's plantation puffed slowly into the main street of the village.

"I hope the house will not be damp," said Miss Minerva to Aunt Cindy, who sat beside her, peering out of the car window.

"Damp! Humph, Miss Minerva, you don't know Aunt Blue-gum Tempy if you think she air gonter let a house get thataway. That 'ooman ain't brung up her own fambly an' pretty nigh brunged up Peruny Pearline's 'thout gittin' whatcher mought

call sanctified ter wuck. She air one er the befo'handes' pussons I ever seed."

Aunt Cindy did not divulge that she had communicated with Sister Blue-gum Tempy many weeks before, through the medium Wilkes Booth Lincoln. The little colored boy had been instructed to write his grandmother that there was a strong possibility that the Major and Miss Minerva would bring the entire household down to the plantation for the summer. It was suggested quite tactfully, so that Miss Minerva need never know that she was in a measure the victim of a family plot.

Aunt Cindy was supposed to have had a kind of vision or dream of her white folks being on the plantation, that dream to have occurred many times, which was a sure sign that it was meant as a warning to Sister Tempy to put her house in order.

Aunt Cindy needed no vision to tell her that Aunt Blue-gum Tempy had turned the great house inside out and that everything would be clean and in such perfect order that even Miss Minerva would not be able to find a speck of dust or mould or a stray cob-web in any remote corner.

Billy had left the plantation when he was a very small boy and had not revisited his birthplace for so many years that his remembrance of the old home was hazy. A scene here and there was vignetted in his childish memory. He could remember the long avenue of gnarled old live oaks leading to the house. He could remember that the house was on a hill — not much of a hill but high enough to give the mansion something of a commanding aspect.

What Billy remembered most clearly was the outline of the house — a long grey roof-line with huge red brick chimneys

at both ends. It had been his custom, ever since he left the plantation and went to live with his Aunt Minerva, to recall that picture to his mind after he got into bed at night. It was as necessary to his peace of mind as saying his prayers. He would shut his eyes and see the beloved house against the evening sky, with swallows circling around the roof and darting down the chimneys. Sometimes he would try to count the swallows as they disappeared, one by one, down the mysterious flues, but sleep always came to him before the last bird left the sky.

The negro quarters he remembered very well and the steamboat landing where catfish and river perch abounded and where once each day a stern wheeler would stop if properly signalled. He remembered a trip he once took on a steamboat and the smell of new oilcloth in the saloon and

the taste of the highly seasoned beefsteaks, thin and dark brown, fried quite done — not at all like the thick, rare steaks the Major so fancied and Aunt Cindy knew so well how to broil. But the steamboat steaks were good too, Billy thought, tasting, he could well imagine, like bear meat. He had heard a fellow traveler from the far West make a statement to that effect at breakfast on that well remembered trip — only the Westerner had called it "bar meat."

Billy remembered the cook on the steamboat, a fat mulatto with a good natured grin, dressed in dirty white, with a flat white cap that made him look like B in the alphabet book: "A is for Apple pie. B Baked it. C Cut it, etc." It was Billy's first book and he remembered the thrill that came to him when he connected the baker in the book with the cook on the boat. He

could remember the puddings on the boat, fearfully and wonderfully made with strange ornamentations that were actually meant to be eaten; and the striped marble cake; and the marvelous skill of the colored waiters as they came swaggering down the length of the saloon, balancing laden trays on their hands and sometimes even on their heads. He remembered the way the table was set with the knives, forks and spoons stacked like guns in front of each place and the napkins skillfully folded in the shape of water lilies and stuck in the glasses. He had often recounted to the incredulous Jimmy tales of that steamboat trip and now, as he neared his old home, he retold to all of the children his impressions of steamboat life.

"An' Maje says if nothin' happens he's a gonter take all of us on a steamboat this summer, God willin'!"

"Pooh, nothin's gonter happen!" cried Jimmy.

"Well, scratch on wood or something will happen," commanded Frances. "'Tain't safe to be so sure, Jimmy Garner."

All of the children solemnly scratched the arms of the seats.

"Some say knocking on wood is more infectious than scratching," said Lina.

"Oh, you're all time thinkin' up somethin' different," grumbled Jimmy. "Scratchin's been good enough so far."

"Well I'm gonter 'make insurance doubly sure'," quoted Lina, "and scratch and knock both."

"I reckon I will too," agreed Billy. "I tell you a steamboat trip is worth lots of trouble. That's where you get style. Why, one little bow-legged waiter used to do a double-shuffle every time he handed you a dish, and a lady with curls all over

her head and a pink sash played on the piano so hard she turned over a vase of flowers stuck up on it."

"How far is it now, Billy, 'til we get to where we're goin'?" asked Jimmy.

"I reckon it's the next station, but I disremember about it, because you see I can't remember 'cept how it looked goin' away. I can't seem to think how Hillsburg looked when you come into it."

"Was Hillsburg named after you, Billy Hill?" asked Frances.

"Now you're foolish, Frances Black," scornfully put in Jimmy. "You know Billy was named after Hillsburg. He ain't nothin' but a little boy an' Hillsburg is so old it's pretty near fallin' down. If this place we are comin' to is it, it must a got named long before Billy was born."

Hillsburg did look rather dilapidated, but it all came back to Billy when he first

glimpsed the little village from the train window. He suddenly recalled the arrangement of the three general stores and the dangerous slant of the walls of the blacksmith's shop.

"Geewhilikins! If there ain't Biddle & Brothers Mercantile Company! Aunt Bluegum Tempy's Peruny Pearline named one of her boys after them. See that sign yonder? I couldn't useter read it when I left here but now I can. I'm sure glad I'm gettin' educated."

"Yonder is my Deci!" shouted Josephine, almost falling out of the window with joy. "Deci! Deci! Here is me!"

In truth, all of the offspring of Peruny Pearline that could possibly manage it had come to the station to greet the incoming party. The platform was black with Billy's friends.

"Hiyer Billy? Hiyer?"

"Hiyer, yourself?" shouted Billy.

"Yonder's Wilkes Booth Lincoln! I 'low he pretty nigh bustin' open with white folks' victuals. Hiyer, Wilkes Booth Lincoln?"

"Jes' tolable," grinned Wilkes Booth Lincoln.

Deci and Josephine came together with a rush. Deci's pig tails were tightly wrapped with red tape and on top of her head was a quivering bow of pink crepe paper. Her emotion over seeing her little white friend again was almost overpowering her. She began immediately asking questions.

"Air the Maje yo gran'pap? Air Miss Minerva yo' aunt, too, an' ain't she gonter 'low me ter come b'long ter you same way Wilkes Booth Lincoln b'longs ter Billy?"

Josephine patiently explained everything. She was eager to answer any ques-

tion her little colored friend might ask. She hugely enjoyed filling the office of mentor, and made a resolution then and there never to be found wanting with an answer, no

matter how difficult the question might be.

"How many minutes it take you ter trabble down here?"

"Oh, 'bout three hundred and sixty five."

"Is all these here chilluns Miss Minerva's?"

"No, jes' Billy and me and Billy ain't to say exactly a sho nough, cross-your-heart-and-die brother. He's a cousin."

"Oh!" exclaimed Deci. "Uncle Jimmy-jawed Jupiter done been a tellin' that Miss Minerva didn't 'low no cussin' a goin' on nowhar."

"I never said cussin'. I said cousin," exclaimed Josephine, but Deci looked mystified and the white child felt that she could not grapple with the explanation of subtle differences of idiomatic English and so changed the subject.

"Has your mother any more little chilluns?"

"She got one mo', but she done los' one too."

"Not dead?" and Josephine's eyes filled sympathetically.

"Not ter say daid," explained Deci. "It's Mose. He done gone off on a steamboat ter be a roustabout. Mammy tuck on somethin' turrible when Mose run away, but Mose he 'lowed the las' wa' one too many fer him."

"What is the last one named?" asked Josephine, whose delight it had always been to have Billy name over all of the many children of Aunt Blue-gum Tempy's Peruny Pearline. Josephine had finally mastered the list herself as fit preparation for plantation life.

"Granny done got a name off'n a soap wrapper. She done call the baby Iovory. She 'lowed it wa' nice white soap an' maybe if the baby got named arfter a white soap she mought be smart like white folks an' clean like soap."

Josephine laughed delightedly.

"Listen!" she cried, "I can say them

all: Admiral Farragut Moses the Prophet Esquire, and then Alice Ann Maria Dan Step-an'-Go-Fetch-It, and then Mount Sinai Tabernacle and First Thessalonians, and there used to be Second Thessalonians but he went dead, and then Oleander Magnolia Althea, and then Gettysburg and Biddle & Brothers Mercantile Company, and then Nicky — that's Wilkes Booth Lincoln — and then you — Decimus Ultimus, and then the twinses, Postle Peter and Pistle Paul, and then Mirabile Dictu, what is called Dick, and now there's Iovory. Oh, I'm so glad we've comed to Billy's plantation!"

CHAPTER VI

WILLIAM GREEN HILL AT HOME

S soon as it was decided that the plantation was to serve as a refuge from the imaginary germs of diphtheria the Major had called Mr. Hopkins, the overseer, on the long distance telephone and directed him to see that the house was put in order and that there were vehicles at the station to accommodate the incoming party.

"It wa' sho fortunate the Lawd sint the vision ter you, Sis Cindy," Aunt Tempy declared as she made room for her old friend on the board that served for a seat in the back of the farm wagon that had conveyed Billy's eager colored friends to the station to meet him. "That there Mr. Hopkins air a good man but he is sho slow ter

move. In good weather I've seed corn grow faster than what that there man moves.

"You sho' is supple, Sis Cindy. Peruny Pearline done said you air got so stout she 'lowed you couldn't mount inter no convenience, but you done clum up inter the waggin lak a cat."

Aunt Cindy beamed happily. "Yes, I's some supple but I ain't tellin' no lie when I say I done stoutened up. You air skinnier than ever, Sis Tempy. I reckon it's all them gran'babies that done slimified you so. Th' ain't nothin' so wearin' as raisin' other folkses chilluns. Howsomever, that low-lifed Jupiter air skinnier than what you is, an' he ain't never raised nothin' but a appetite sence I's knowed him an' I's knowed him ever sence he could walk around on them little bandy legs er hissen.

"Look at him now, a bowin' an' scrapin'

in front er the Major an' Miss Minerva! He needn't be a thinkin' he can put anything over on Miss Minerva. That there white 'ooman air hard to fool, an' she ain't got a bit er use for a shiftless nigger. The Major's diffunt. 'Tain't that he air easy to fool but he air kinder soft like 'bout other folkses' failin's. He don't mind how much money a man owes him jes' so's he kin git a good larf out'n him."

It was difficult to realize that Uncle Jimmy-jawed Jupiter and Aunt Cindy were man and wife. Certainly their greeting at the station had nothing in it to suggest connubial relations. His consisted in a grin, hers in a grunt. Uncle Jupiter had been chosen as a suitable person to drive the carryall, because of his long tailed blue coat with brass buttons and a legend in the quarters that in days gone by the old man had been somebody's coachman. In

reality the coat, which was several sizes too large for him, had been purchased by Aunt Cindy at an auction many years ago, before, as she expressed it, she had done los' her tas'e for him.

"He looks mo' like a baboon than ever," continued Aunt Cindy scornfully, as her spouse cracked his whip with a great flourish, the carryall having been filled to overflowing with passengers and baggage.

"I been a layin' off to arsk you fer goin' on thirty year howcum you ever jined fo'ces with Brer Jupiter," said Aunt Tempy. "He wan't never ter say likely lookin'."

"I disremember," confessed Aunt Cindy solemnly, "but as fur as I kin recall I reckon I tuck him ter git shet er him."

"Ain't it the truf?" chimed in Aunt Tempy.

Jimmy and Billy and Wilkes Booth

Lincoln had crowded into a lop-sided buggy with First Thessalonians and Gettysburg, known in every day vernacular as Fust

and Git. The little girls must content themselves with seats in the carryall, Josephine insisting upon sitting in front with

Uncle Jupiter, whom she still called "the monkey's papa." Of course the faithful Deci was by her side.

The road from Hillsburg to the plantation was a kindly, friendly road, that seemed to have plenty of time to wind in and out of pleasant beech woods, across cotton fields, up one hill, just to accommodate some person who had built a house on top, and down another hill, so the horses could stop and take a drink in a bubbling little stream at the bottom.

"Gee, I'd like to get my toes in there!" cried Jimmy. "What's the reason we can't get out and wade, Billy?" Jimmy began to pull off his shoes and stockings.

"Let's wait until we get home and then, after we get settled we can come back," suggested Billy. "Let's don't do anything to rile Aunt Minerva — leastways not just yet. We've got on our town clothes and

we'd better save 'em to go back in. We'll have lots of time to wade all summer."

Billy was feeling quiet and he longed to be alone with his thoughts. Certainly he did not intend on this first day of homecoming to do anything to make it difficult for his aunt. Bit by bit memories of his early childhood came back to him. There was the great oak tree marking the line between the Hill place and the Gale's, that had been struck by lightning years and years ago. It was still standing gaunt and black. Billy remembered with a shudder the tale Mose had told him about a crowd of masked men having lynched a man on that very limb that projected so invitingly over the road. He pointed it out to Jimmy, who experienced the proper thrills.

"They's some what say that there tree wa'n't never struck by thunder," said Fust,

"but the hand of the debble done turned it black an' blighted it 'case of the deed that wa' done on one er its limbs. Ol' Mr. Gale 'low time an' time again he gwine ter cut that tree down, 'case it is part on his plantation an' part on Billy's but ev'y las' time he sen' the men out with the axes sumpen done happen ter stop 'em. One time it wa' colic that hit Si Jones an' double him up so that folkes had ter sit on his haid an' feet ter keep him from growin' crooked fur good an' all. Mr. Gale said it wa'n't nothin' but green watermillions he stole out'n his fiel', but Si say he done stole too many watermillions befo' then ter be a blamin' them. He is sartain sho it wa' the debble got him 'case er his goin' ter cut down the tree."

"Another time," Git took up the tale, "Mike Dooley, that Irish hand Mr. Gale done got here from Lou'ville, started out

with his ax an' a rope ter pull the tree to keep it from fallin' on the road an' bless the Lawd if he didn't git one er his foots jammed down a ol' post hole where the fence useter divide the meadow over yonder. If Uncle Snake-bit Bob hadn't a come erlong I reckon the buzzards would a got Mike. Uncle Bob loosed up the yearth with the ax an' he tied the rope to a little tree near by an' give Mike holt of the yuther end an' let him pull hisse'f out. Uncle Bob ain't got much stren'th along er bein' so bit up. I reckon Mr. Gale about give up tryin' ter git that ol' debble tree cut down."

"It's as hollow as a blowed up hawg bladder," said Fust. "They's some that say the debble air got a do' in that tree that comes out down in the groun' an' leads straight ter the bad place. Some says the debble uses it an' some says witches does

an' some says ghos'es," continued Fust.

"Mo'n likely skunks," suggested Wilkes Booth Lincoln gently. His older brothers looked at him a moment sideways, doubtful whether or not to take issue actively with this young upstart from town. His store clothes and his book learning had been impressed upon them time and time again by the letters he had written to their grandmother in the name of Aunt Cindy. They decided that in spite of his superior advantages their young brother bore himself modestly enough and perhaps discretion would be the better part of valor in their treatment of him.

"Skunks too," continued Git. "Whar skunks air, mo'n likely you finds wuss things, an' whar wuss things air you mo'n likely finds skunks."

"Th' ain't anything worse than skunks," declared Jimmy. "But I'm a gonter find

out what's in that tree before I leave these diggings. I'm all the time not afraid of witches an' ghosts. Leastways not in daytime."

"I reckon not! Who air?" said Fust, "But I 'low you wouldn't go perusin' roun' that ol' debble tree after it come dark. Why, the teams theyselves always runs past that tree. Mr. Gale says it's 'case the drivers are always whippin' 'em up an' the hosses done learnt to git a move on 'em befo' they feel the lash."

"I betcher I would go there at night," boasted Jimmy. "Billy an' me ain't afraid of nothin'. Are we Billy?"

"Nothing but germs," teased Billy.

"Well you needn't be so smarty about germs. If I wasn't all the time most finding diphtheria germs Miss Minerva Major wouldn't have picked up and come off down here. I'm 'bout the smartest boy in town

for getting boys' aunts to be so scared about their kids that they come down to plantations."

There was no denying this assertion. Billy contented himself with an exchange of winks with Wilkes Booth Lincoln. Git whipped up the patient old mare. Soon came a turn in the road, a dip to another little stream, a rise through a bit of beech woods and there was home! The same grey roofs and great red chimneys. The same huge cedars standing like sentinels on each side of the building. A lump came in Billy's throat. Suddenly he remembered his father with a vividness that almost made him feel that he was standing there on the broad, hospitable steps to greet his son and his guests — even to greet his sister-in-law, Aunt Minerva.

There had been no love lost between the gay young William Hill and the austere

sister of his wife Margaret. Antagonism from the beginning had prevented their ever really becoming acquainted and the elopement with Margaret had eliminated any possibility of Billy's father and Miss Minerva knowing and liking one another. The sisters had never met after the elopement, although Mrs. Hill had repeatedly written begging Miss Minerva to forgive and forget and come and visit her on the plantation. The elder sister had proven adamant however and had followed what she chose to consider were the dictates of her conscience, comforting herself with dire quotations such as "If thy hand offend thee cut it off." Bitterly had she reproached herself in after years for her unrelenting spirit.

So Billy's throat was not the only one in which a lump had arisen. Poor Minerva was almost choking with emotion as she

beheld for the first time the house to which her young sister had come a bride, where she had lived those short, happy years as a wife and mother, where she had died all too soon — so young, so beautiful, so beloved. To Billy's mind's eye had come a vision of his handsome, glowing father but to his aunt's came that of the young sister. How many times must she have tripped from that front door across the gallery and down the hospitable steps? How often had she sat on that old moss covered stone bench under the yew tree?

Miss Minerva remembered that one of Margaret's letters had been written on that very bench. Margaret had mentioned the fact, apologizing for writing with a pencil. In that letter she had begged again that her sister should forgive and forget. Ah, could she but know that poor Minerva could never forgive and never forget her

own hard hearted refusal to be reconciled to her beloved sister. All she could do now was be as much of a mother to the orphan Billy as she could be to a healthy, active, natural boy. At least she had given Billy an uncle-in-law, and that surely should be accounted to her for righteousness.

But this homecoming was no time for lumps in throats to be encouraged. Billy must swallow his, and do the honors of his beloved home to his guests. They must be shown all over the house from cellar to garret. It was a most fascinating garret, full of dark nooks and corners, with broken furniture piled up on unfloored rafters and old trunks that reminded one of the chest in "The Mistletoe Bough," wherein the bride had found a fatal hiding place. It was a garret for rainy days and dress-up games, so Lina and Frances decided. The

cellar started on a level with the back yard, and then burrowed deep under ground, with room after room that suggested mystery on mystery and smelled of vinegar and spiced pickles and old wine casks, although it had been many a year since there had been anything in the nature of pickles or wines to furnish such an aroma.

Miss Minerva must swallow her lump and again begin to keep house, although Aunt Cindy assured her all would be well without her doing anything but enjoy her visit. But Miss Minerva trusted nobody but herself where housekeeping was concerned. Every closet must be inspected, every bed carefully and suspiciously examined by those anxious housekeeping eyes. Aunt Tempy followed after the new mistress showing her blue gums in happy consciousness that no crack or crevice had

been unvisited by her busy broom and scrubbing brush. With the help of Alice Ann and Oleander, and occasional conscription of some of the grandsons, the old woman had made the mansion to shine with its ancient glory. She had been caretaker ever since the departure of Aunt Cindy and had discharged her duties faithfully in the way of occasional sweepings and periodic airings but not for many years had such an upheaval taken place in the old house as had come to pass all because of Aunt Cindy's timely dreams and visions.

With her inspection concluded Miss Minerva could but pronounce approval of everything.

"What I tell you?" said Aunt Cindy. "Didn't I say that Sis Blue-gum Tempy wa' one er the befo'handedes' 'oomans in Tennessee?"

CHAPTER VII

FRANCES GIVES A PARTY

H, Aunt Minerva," cried Billy, "please won't you buy all your provisions from Mount Sinai Tabernacle's store? He's the one called Si for short. He's Aunt Bluegum Tempy's Peruny Pearline's son an' he's got a store and he may take in Fust and Git for partners if they ever stop eating up all the candy he's laid in. Jimmy and Lina and Frances and I are going to help him keep store.

"Aunt Minerva, you ought to see the store. It's the cunningest little store you ever saw — just like the one Ginger and Pickles kept — they are the dog and cat in Jo's picture book — and, Aunt Minerva, the store just opened. Si said he thought

it might be a convenience for you, and Aunt Blue-gum Tempy 'vanced him the money to start it. You can get flour and lard and soap and sugar and salt and pepper and vinegar and mustard and meal and 'lasses and coffee and nuts and rice and macaroni and a whole big cheese that ain't never been cut into. Si has got scrubbing brushes and blue jeans pants, and pain-killer and iodine and pins, and any time anybody wants a coffin Si is thinkin' about laying in one for 'commodation."

Miss Minerva agreed to purchase groceries from Aunt Blue-gum Tempy's grandson but she devoutly hoped she would have no need of the pain-killer or of the coffin.

This store was of more thrilling interest to the children than anything else they found in the country. Playing store had ever been one of their favorite pastimes and here was a really truly shop, behind

whose counter they were allowed to go at will and sell for bona fide money actual merchandise. Most of their sales were to one another, but what mattered that? They took turn about being store keeper and customer.

The store was a tiny structure, not far from Peruny Pearline's cabin. It was a mail order house, purchased by the enterprising Peruny with a view to taking in boarders during a season of road mending and bridge building that had been going on in the neighborhood. She had been lured by the extreme cheapness of the ready made house, a picture of which in the catalogue was very alluring. Seventy two by one hundred and eight inches had been plainly marked under the beautiful picture. That had sounded extremely large.

Admiral Farragut Moses the Prophet Esquire had been given the task of finding

out just how big such a house was. After many deep sea soundings and long wanderings in the desert poor Mose came through. He reasoned if there were three feet in a yard and twelve inches in a foot you must first multiply by three and then divide by twelve and the answer would be how many feet. With proof and counter proof and much agonizing figuring he finally announced the beautiful house was eighteen by twenty-seven feet. Peruny Pearline was delighted. That was larger than the big dining room at the mansion. She could not only have boarders but when she got over her most recent attack of religious devotion, she might run a dance hall with great profit.

The house came. Its parts dovetailed neatly and exactly as the catalogue had stated they would. The little window fitted in and the door almost hung itself.

It certainly was a charming little house. But loud was the wailing of Peruny Pearline when she found her beloved Mose had slightly miscalculated and it was six by nine feet — not only not big enough for a dance hall but not even big enough for more than one boarder, unless they should be willing to "lay mighty clost an' keerful." Thus the house stood, a constant reminder to Peruny Pearline of her financial ruin. To be sure, the house had not cost so very much, but she counted as loss all that she had not made on the venture. So Peruny was willing to have Si start the store, especially since her mother was to finance it.

Mount Sinai Tabernacle — Si for short — had never been very active where exertion was required. He was a round, sleek, brown-skinned boy, good natured, kindly, with ambition only to eat and sleep and

capable of any subterfuge to avoid work. The idea of a store for Si had been in Aunt Tempy's mind for some time.

"Somehow his name air done sanctified him against wuck," she had argued. "Co'se Si air a great wucker ter keep from wuckin'. One time I 'lowed he mought be a preacher but, bless Bob if he ain't too slow an' loungin' ter so much as git 'ligion. Keepin' sto' air the very thing for him, 'specially where he kin sit in the middle an retch ter every corner of the room 'thout movin' none."

With the combined efforts of the whole family, shelves were carpentered, Si doing the head work most diligently and so successfully that the shelves almost fitted. A counter was formed with two barrels and a board and then Aunt Tempy produced the savings of half a lifetime and the shelves were filled to overflowing with the

usual things found in country stores. There was a sign where the lane ran into the main road which advertised the mercantile venture entered upon by Si and his grandmother. With crooked letters which ran up hill the sign declared that the little red house "Down yander Is a sto'. Welcum."

Store keeping was a more strenuous occupation than Si had realized. He had thought the counter would make an excellent day-bed and had planned to nap away the summer afternoons undisturbed, but customers had a way of coming to trade at inopportune moments and Aunt Tempy demanded a strict accounting of goods sold, which made it necessary to keep books, such as they were. Fust and Git could not be trusted to leave in charge of the shop because of the candy, which was the chief item of sales. Si welcomed the white children with delight. They wanted to help

all the time and he was quite willing to accommodate them.

"Billy nor none er his frien's wouldn't steal — leastways not from colored folks," declared Si. "That there Jimmy air pow'ful fat ter trus' with a new shipment er choclid kivered cocoanut bars but I reckon s'long as he's Billy's comp'ny I kin even trus' him, fat legs an' all."

Si then busied himself making a hammock with barrel staves and two oak saplings, which he hung in the shade at the back of the store and covered with pine branches to keep the barrel staves from pressing too rudely on his soft rotundity. A luxurious day-bed indeed!

While Si dozed Billy and his friends bought and sold all-day suckers, candy kisses — a motto on every one — and tepid sarsaparilla and lemon-pop to be drunk from the bottle. There was chewing gum

of all flavors and degrees of gumminess and stickiness, and in fact the little red store offered almost everything in the way of food or drink.

Despite the fact that Major Estes was

soon obliged to leave the plantation for a business trip, Miss Minerva found life at Billy's old home very pleasant indeed. Her days sped by peacefully and she enjoyed the quiet beauty of the old place.

The first few days brought no worries at all. The children had been so good one hardly knew they were on the plantation. They appeared at the house only at meal time and then ate politely and sparingly — not with the loud and clamorous appetites which was usual with Billy and Jimmy.

"I am glad I invited Lina and Frances," Miss Minerva remarked to Aunt Cindy. "I think they have a refining influence on the boys. I am afraid Billy and Jimmy would have relapsed into barbarism if they had spent the summer down here in the country with no girls to remind them of the importance of good manners."

"Ain't it the truf? A shemale air a coal of fire in the back of a hemale, spurrin' him on t' ambition. If he don't keep a goin' she'll give him a taste er what's in sto' for him. He'd better take notice er his tormenters on the yearth if he don't

want ter rile in eternal torment below the yearth." Thus spoke Aunt Cindy.

Perhaps could Miss Minerva have peeped into Si's store at that moment she might have changed her mind concerning the refining influence the girls were having on the boys. The truth of the matter was, too many sweets washed down with too many tepid soft drinks and offset occasionally with long dill pickles, had made a deadly change in the dispositions of all the children. The sprightly Jimmy was silent and depressed. Billy, usually so sweet tempered, was inclined to be peevish. Frances had quarreled with Lina over some imaginary ill, and Lina was on the verge of tears, declaring she was so homesick she couldn't stand life another moment.

Si lay in his barrel-stave hammock rocked by the river breeze, sleeping the sleep of the just and unjust, who have no

cares for the day or thoughts of the morrow.

"I've spent all my 'lowance for three weeks," wailed Jimmy.

"Well, you've spent it on yourself," said Billy. "You've drunk all the lemon-pop in the store 'til you've got gas bubbles enough in you to float you off like a balloon. I haven't seen you even treat the ladies."

"Ladies, huh! Do you mean Lina and Frances?" Lina stopped weeping long enough to stick out her tongue at Jimmy. "Treatin' women folks has gone out of style since they are jest as liable to alimony as men. I haven't seen them do any treatin'. Lina an' Frances have both of them got wash money, too, that their mothers gave them. My mother handed mine over to Miss Minerva Major or I'd have treated a whole lot. I ain't gonter need any wash money down here, 'cause

my khaki clothes don't show dirt. If I had as much money as your old ladies I'd even give a party. They're too stingy to use up their wash money."

"Stingy nothing!" broke in Frances. "Lina — I mean Miss Hamilton — and I won't go around in conscious dirt. Our clothes must be washed, mustn't they, Li —?" Frances stopped suddenly, remembering that she was having a quarrel with Lina and was not speaking to her bosom friend, except with frigid formality.

"Oh, why don't you and Lina stop fussing?" asked Billy crossly. "It ain't no use. Why don't you forgive and forget?"

"I have already forgotton what we were mad about," sobbed Lina, "but I can never forgive her."

"All right, you do the forgetting and I'll do the forgiving," snapped Frances.

"It's no fun to fuss with you anyhow, Lina Hamilton, because you always cry and act so 'bused. Now I like to have a fuss with Jimmy because he's so combustious. I'm never going to quarrel with you again, long as I live, Lina Hamilton."

"Oh-o! Cru-hu-el! I thought I was your be-hest friend."

"Well, all the samey I'm never gonter fuss with you again. You are too soft. If nobody's got any money left let's wake up Si to 'tend to his own store and go off and do something else. For goodness sake stop bawling, Lina."

"My hea-a-rt is broke in two-ho-ho."

"Oh, cheer up! I'll quarrel with you some more if that's what's the matter. I'll do it whether it's any fun or not. What's more I'll give a party on my wash money. I reckon I can do without getting my clothes washed. I believe I'll buy some overalls

with part of the money and then I needn't have any washing done at all. I reckon Miss Minerva Major wouldn't mind my wearing overalls. She's real strong minded, so my mammy says, and some strong minded ladies wear pants."

Frances accordingly purchased a pair of blue overalls from Billy, whose turn it was to keep store. They were several sizes too large for her but then, as the salesman assured her she was liable to grow and the overalls were sure to shrink if she ever did decide to wash them, she was content and immediately donned them over her gingham dress.

"Now for the party!" cried Frances. "Where's Wilkes Booth Lincoln and Josephine and Deci? When I give a party I give a real one. Lina you run get the rest of the kids and you might as well bring along Postle Peter and Pistle Paul while

you are about it and Dictu. They are great hands for eating up the leavings. I've got my wash money right here sewed in my hat band for safe keeping," and she ripped out several bills with a flourish.

"Now let's have the rest of the sarsaparilla. If old greedy Jimmy hadn't have guzzled all the lemon-pop we'd have some of that too. Now, Billy, hand out the cocoanut bars and the peppermint fish and the ginger snaps. There's mighty little candy left. Let's just take it all while we are about it and Si'll have to lay in more. There sure is mighty little left."

"Here's some pink drops on the shelf," Frances rattled on. "We haven't had any of those yet. I reckon they'll be good too. Smell kinder funny but we can wash 'em down with sarsaparilla."

Billy accordingly emptied into the box top which was serving as a candy plate

several packages of the strange-smelling pink lozenges.

The party turned into a picnic. The table was spread under a great beech tree near the store. Everybody who was invited came and several others who were not invited. Those who joined the crowd without the formality of receiving invitations were several little pickaninnies who had come to the store with their pennies in their mouths, with the intention of exchanging them for all-day suckers.

It was a merry crowd. Jimmy threw off his deep seated melancholy and Billy's unwonted peevishness left him. Lina and Frances were friends again, and all of the little darkies were happy indeed at being invited to a white folks' party.

"I don't think much of those pink drops," said Lina, making a face but bravely swallowing the rosy lozenges.

"Th' ain't very good but they help to fill up," declared Frances, "and everybody must eat some so the candy'll go around."

It was Frances's party and her mandate was obeyed. Jimmy disguised the taste of his by chewing them up with lemon fish. The seventeen-year locusts could not have wiped out the crops more completely than the crowd of children cleared up that picnic. What the little white children left the little colored ones devoured.

"Now I reckon Si'll have to wake up and tend to his store," said Billy. "He hasn't got much left to tend to but some iodine and pain-killer. He ain't gonter have that long, I'm afraid, 'cause I'm feelin' mighty funny in the innards."

"Me too," groaned Jimmy. "I reckon I oughtn'ter et that saltine."

"Let's go back to the big house and take a little nap before dinner," suggested

Frances, who always had a practical suggestion.

"Dinner! Don't talk to me about dinner," begged Lina. "I am full to depletion."

To the house they trooped and crept in the back way and up to their beds without letting either Aunt Cindy or Miss Minerva know.

Dinner came and there were no children. Aunt Cindy rang the big farm bell vigorously and called loudly for Wilkes Booth Lincoln to draw fresh water and come take in the dinner. Poor Wilkes Booth Lincoln had taken refuge behind the barn and there given himself up to misery.

Josephine, with flushed face and heavy eyes, had crawled into her mother's lap, while the faithful Deci had run off to her mother's cabin.

"Aunt Cindy, I'm afraid Josephine is

ill," Miss Minerva called out. "Could it be that she is coming down with that dreadful disease from which we have flown? She is quite feverish. Oh why did Joseph go away? Where are those children?"

After much ringing and shouting there was at last a feeble response from Billy, who had been fast asleep, worn out with the pain in his "innards."

"We ain't hungry, Aunt Cindy," he called. "We took away our appetites."

Aunt Cindy mounted to the second story where she found all the house party very sick indeed. Word came from Aunt Bluegum Tempy that all of her grandchildren were down with "sompen".

Investigation brought to light the recent feast. Miss Minerva was relieved it was not diphtheria. She armed herself with a huge bottle of castor oil and a tablespoon

and, with a stern and determined countenance, prepared to administer to Billy and Josephine and their guests.

The children buried their faces in the pillows and kicked feebly.

"Please don't, Miss Minerva! My mamma all the time don't never make me take castor oil," begged Jimmy. "She says it ain't up-to-date."

"And my mother says it is poison to my cistern," wailed Lina.

"You take the first dose, Billy," commanded his aunt sternly.

"Ever since I's born I been letting the company have first," pleaded Billy.

"Stop Miss Minerva! Stop!" cried Aunt Cindy, coming up the steps as fast as her great weight would allow. "Don't give um nothin' in the way er physic! Stop while there's time!"

"Nonsense! Billy, open your mouth."

"Listen ter me, Miss Minerva," panted Aunt Cindy. "I done been 'vestigatin' the cause er all this here gruntin' an' groanin' an' I done 'skivered that these here chilluns air been a feastin' on vermifuge candy. Amongst them they done et enough ter s'ply the whole county. Jes' save yo' ile, Miss Minerva."

When she had assured herself that the effect of the pink lozenges would not be harmful — however painful — Miss Minerva's stern countenance relaxed in a wise and patient smile.

CHAPTER VIII

MYSTERIES OF THE ATTIC

THE members of Billy's house party awoke on the morning following the weird feast at Si's store feeling so languid that the patter of rain on the roof interested them not. For several days the children were so limp that the weather made little difference to them, but one morning the whole crowd tumbled down stairs well and hungry and, as Aunt Cindy expressed it "rombustious." Aunt Cindy, wise in the ways of the young, had foreseen the recovery and fortunately had waffles for breakfast and plenty of them.

"Gee! I'm glad we are through with old toast," said Billy tucking his napkin

about his neck, evidently bent on an attack in force on the waffle platter.

"I can 'most hear it crunching inside me," declared Jimmy. "I reckon I muster fell off fifty pounds since I've been sick. I don't see why old Frances had to be so smart givin' a party. Anyhow she better a bought black overalls 'cause she can't get any washin' done all summer."

"Indeed she can," put in Lina. "I'm going to share my wash money with Frances, 'cause we've been so near dead together that I can never forget it. I couldn't let my best friend go dirty. Besides Frances has written a 'pistle to her mother and made a clean bosom of all our troubles and Mrs. Black is sure to send some more wash money to her own little daughter who has been most dead 'cause of pink lozenges."

"Frances need not have been uneasy,"

smiled Miss Minerva, who was so thankful that no permanent injury had resulted to her charges because of the candy party that she felt quite genial. "I surely could manage to have my guest's laundry done."

"My mother says that's one thing she won't do," said Lina. "She says that company's got to pay for their washing and their doctor's bills and if they happen to die on you they've got to pay their own funeral expenses."

"I think if they caught what they died of while they were a visitin' they ought to get their funeral 'spenses paid," argued Jimmy.

"That would have made it right hard on Aunt Minerva," objected Billy. "'Specially when she didn't have a thing to do with our eating pink vermifuge."

"Who's talkin' about us dying?"

"I was. I tell you," said Billy, his

mouth very full of waffles and syrup, "I was afraid I was gonter die when I heard Aunt Cindy a ringing the bell and a hollerin' for us to come to dinner and when Aunt Minerva came along with her big bottle I wisht I had died. First I was afraid I was gonter die and then I felt so onery I was afraid I wasn't gonter die."

"One time I thought I was already dead," said Jimmy. "I was sicker'n any of you, 'cause I've got the bigges' stummick, an' there's more of me to ache. I reckon I kin get sicker than anybody in Tennessee 'thout dyin'."

"I reckon you can do more bragging than anybody in the world without anything to brag about," said Frances. "Anybody that can brag about a stomach ache!"

"Oh, you think you're smart since you got some men's overalls," said Jimmy scornfully.

"Aw come on, let's don't get to fussin'," begged Billy. "Let's get up a good rainy day game."

"All right," assented Jimmy, who never sulked even when worsted by the nimble witted Frances, "let's play sliding down the banisters. It would kinder rub our tummies an' make 'em feel good."

Miss Minerva was trying to school herself not to put any unnecessary restrictions on the children's games but sliding down banisters was one of the things she could not abide. Before she could protest, however, Billy suggested a game of "I spy" all over the house.

"There are more places to hide than enough, but no fair going in Aunt Minerva's room or the cellar," said Billy.

"I spy" all over the house was even worse than sliding down the banisters in the opinion of poor Miss Minerva.

"I'm too comvalesson to romp," complained Lina, who was still a little pale.

"Of course you are! All of us are!" exclaimed Frances. "Why not play in the attic? It's just meant for a rainy day."

Miss Minerva sighed with relief. The matter had been taken out of her hands without her having to make herself disagreeable. She looked approvingly at Frances, and decided that she was a clever, tactful little girl.

Aunt Blue-gum Tempy's housecleaning had extended only to the part of the attic that was floored over, and it had been rather sketchy there. An occasional stirring up of the dust of ages and wiping off the trunks and boxes was enough cleaning to do in a place that was no doubt full of spooks. She would not have opened one of the trunks for anything, nor would one of her grandchildren.

The white children had no fear at all of the attic or of its contents. They had Miss Minerva's permission to play up there and to rummage through any and all of the boxes and trunks and chests of drawers. The light came dimly through the dusty, small-paned windows, but the housewifely Lina wiped them off with an old curtain, and two windows on the south side were opened for much needed air.

"Let's go in the trunks first," suggested Lina. "It thrills me to think what we may find."

"We've got a long rainy day ahead of us, so we mustn't be too fast about using up our thrills," ruled Frances. "One box at a time!"

The first box opened was full of old books, yellow with age and the calf bindings dry and crackling.

"They look kinder interesting," said

Billy, to whom books must prove themselves uninteresting before he would believe anything but the best of them. He picked up a great tome reverently and opened it at random.

"Why, it's all about bones!" he cried. "Here's a human skelington. Gee! Ain't he skinny?"

"Ugh! Shut it up!" begged Lina. "It gives me the creeps."

"I reckon these books must a been my father's grandfather's. He was a doctor," explained Billy.

"That's your grandfather, once removed," said Lina. "I know a lot about geology since my mother got busy about joining the Colonial Dames."

"Well I wisht he'd once removed his old books," broke in Jimmy. "Let's don't dig any more in that box. Books ain't any fun — besides ain't it vacation?"

"There might be something better in this box," said Billy. "I think it will be lots more fun if we keep a lookin' in one box 'til it's 'zausted."

"Of course it would," agreed Frances. "Jimmy's always so greedy."

"Greedy huh! You're always so bossy an' you're all time takin' up for Billy. I believe you're stuck on Billy anyhow."

Frances flushed. "Well nobody's stuck on you anyhow — so what's it to you? You'll have to go live where fatness is the style before you get a beau lover."

"Aw, don't let's fuss," pleaded Billy, digging deeper into the box of books. "Here's one called 'Sanford and Merton.' I betcher that's a peach. Here's one about Indians called 'The Pathfinder.' I'm gonter keep these out and we can read them aloud."

The rest of the books in that box were

all on anatomy and chemistry and Billy was reluctantly persuaded to give up his search among them for more thrillers that might be read aloud.

"Please let's open a trunk of clothes now," begged Lina. "This one over here is mighty 'citing looking. The top's so heavy I can't lift it all by myself."

"It's locked, nut," said Jimmy after tugging vainly in his endeavor to prove his superior strength.

"The key's in the lock, Mr. Wiseman," said Frances, deftly turning it and opening the lid quite easily.

"Oh! How lovely!" cried the little girls. "Wedding clothes! Veils! Slippers!"

"Now you ol' girls will be all time dressin' up," grumbled Jimmy.

"We certainly will," agreed Frances. "And oh, Jimmy, see here! Here's an

opera hat you can wear and a 'broidered waistcoat, and a long tailed coat."

"See me wear that hat! Why, it's flat as a pancake."

"Well," said Lina, "that's the way they made 'em, so's gemmen could sit on their own hats at the theatre. Look, you can open it up."

With a twist of her wrist she opened the opera hat and then clapped it on Jimmy's head.

"Oh, Jimmy, you do look darling! There's a cracked mirror over there in that bureau — that one stuck against the wall. Do go look at yourself. Be careful though, 'cause there's no floor over there. You have to walk along the rafters."

"Yes, and for goodness sake don't go bustin' through," cried Frances. "That's right over our room and Lina and I don't want any big holes in our ceiling. Here,

put on the coat too, Jimmy. I'll give it to you that you certainly do look cute."

Jimmy balanced himself carefully along the rafters and had the satisfaction of look-

ing in the cracked mirror and admiring himself extremely in the dress coat and opera hat.

"Gee! Don't you wish we'd a had these clothes when we played gettin' married that time in church when we got shut

in and had to climb up in the tower and ring the bell? I'd a been a peach of a bridegroom in this get up," said Master Garner.

The children laughed at Jimmy's evident satisfaction in his appearance. Lina put on a satin gown and veil and white slippers which were a tight fit because, as she explained: "In olden days ladies never walked on their feet at all and consequentially their feet didn't grow any bigger'n Chinee feet."

"What did they walk on then?" asked Billy.

"History fails to relate," said Lina. "But I feel like the bride in 'The Mistletoe Bough.' I'm almost afraid to lean over an open trunk for fear I'd fall in and the lid would close down on me and I wouldn't be found until I was nothing but bones. These clothes make me feel kinder sad.

I reckon the folks that wore them must be dead and gone long years ago. This dress couldn't a been your mother's, was it Billy?"

"No, 'cause my mother ran off an' got married an' she didn't have a white dress and veil," said Billy sadly. "That musta been my grandmother's or maybe her mother's. Let's lift up the tray and dig down farther."

"It seems like the ashes of the dead past," sentimentalized Lina.

The tray was removed and the children bent eagerly over the trunk, lifting out treasure after treasure in the shape of old-fashioned gowns, lace caps and shawls and a wonderful green riding habit, with a skirt that must surely have swept the ground on anything but an abnormally long-legged horse. The basque was trimmed with row upon row of tiny brass buttons.

"Gee, Billy! Why didn't you never tell us you had a circus rider in yo' fam'ly?" cried Jimmy. "I'd ruther my grandmother had been a circus rider than anything on earth. My mother's grandfather was something kinder like a circus rider but you don't spell it the same way, and you don't pronounce it quite the same way either. He was what you call a circuit rider. Miss Celia 'splained the difference to me but th' ain't much."

"I don't believe my grandmother was any more of a circus rider than your grandfather was," laughed Billy. "Aunt Cindy's told me lots of times how my grandmother used to put on her green riding habit, all trimmed with brass buttons, and ride over to meeting. She was great on going to church and when the roads were too bad for the carriage she used to go on horseback."

"Oh!" screamed Lina, who had gone to digging diligently in the wonder chest. "Oh! I touched hair — human hair!"

"Billy's grandmother's wig, I reckon," said Frances. "Let me see." The children crowded close around the trunk, while Frances removed another layer of clothing. Suddenly they started back in horror.

"A little dead baby!" cried Lina. "Oh, poor little thing! Isn't it beautiful?"

"Let me outer here!" commanded Jimmy, who was wedged in against the wall. "Let me out! I ain't a gonter play aroun' no corpses."

"It looks so sweet and happy, somehow I am not scared of it," whispered Lina. "Who you s'pose — how you s'pose — ? Why, Billy, it must be your great aunt or something."

Billy, who had been as horror stricken as the others at first, had summoned his wits

and with the quick reasoning powers that made the Major hope he would choose the law as a profession had come to the rapid conclusion that the beautiful thing that lay in the old trunk was not a dead child — not a child at all, in fact. How could it be? Like a flash the poem of 'The Mistletoe Bough' came to him. The bride in that story had been but a heap of bones when the trunk was opened. This so-called corpse was plump and rosy and smiling.

It was a beautiful wax doll, reverently laid away by some dead and gone ancestress of Billy's. The modern children playing in that attic had never seen a wax doll. Muriel and Gladys Maude, the beloved of Frances and Lina, were of bisque, as were all the fine dolls of the day. Josephine loved best a rag doll, that could be squeezed to death without injury. The bisque doll is perhaps more lifelike than the wax but,

as Lina said, the wax one was so much more "deathlike."

"Of course you are not scared." Billy broke the breathless silence, speaking in an ordinary tone of voice. "It is just a lovely doll baby." Hearing this, the little girls at once took heart.

"Oh shucks! Ol' Lina's all time gettin' scared an' sayin' dolls are dead babies," spake the relieved Jimmy. "It's nothin' but a ol' doll baby."

"I wasn't scared a teensy-weensy bit," declared Lina. "And I feel most as solemn over it being a doll baby as being a real baby, cause some child that used to love it and hug it and dress it and curl its beautiful hair is dead and gone and — and — I — I — can't help crying some for that little girl."

Jimmy sniffed scornfully, but Billy gave him a sharp dig in the region of his ribs

and Jimmy discreetly desisted from comment.

"If Lina chooses to cry over my grandmother, or whoever it was that owned this doll, I ain't a gonter have you breaking up the funeral, Jimmy Garner," said Billy, in tones of command.

As reverently as though it were a real baby, Lina lifted the beautiful doll from the trunk where it had lain for so many years. Its gorgeous pink satin dress was as fresh as it had been when some little girl had grown up and put away all childish things.

"My grandmother says silk useter be better than it is now," said Frances. "If you put away the silk they make now, it is all split when you take it out. Only look at her little undies, how precious they are! Such teensy-weensy stitches and lace and tucks, all hand work! Look at her

kid shoes and her silk stockings! Isn't her hair be-u-tiful?"

Lina held the doll erect and wide the blue eyes opened.

"Look! Look! She's not dead!" cried Lina. "I somehow felt like she was, but look at her eyes. Oh, you preciums cut-ums!" She clasped the wide-eyed Paris beauty to her bosom, hugging it frantically.

A strange bleat came from the internal arrangements of the toy. No doubt its maker fondly imagined it sounded like "mama." Whatever it sounded like, it made Jimmy jump and so startled Lina that she came near dropping the doll baby.

"That came when you pressed its tummy," laughed Billy. "It certainly did sound funny."

"Jimmy was scairt," declared Frances. "I saw him jump. I believe Jimmy is a kinder 'fraid cat anyhow."

"Scairt nothin'! I jumped 'cause a mouse was most runnin' up my leg."

"Mouse! Where, where?" cried Frances wildly.

"Hah! Ain't you the brave little girl?" mocked Jimmy. "I betcher you an' Lina are scairt of more things than mice. I betcher you are scairt of spooks, too."

"Not at all," declared Frances. "I don't even believe in spooks."

"Neither do I," said Lina, "but of course I wouldn't like to meet one."

"Well, neither would I," said Frances, "to be real honest. I reckon you wouldn't either, Jimmy Garner. I betcher you and Billy would be as scairt as the next if you met a spook."

"How can you meet something if you don't believe in it?" laughed Billy.

"Well, your believing in them or not believing in them don't make them to be

or not to be," said Lina. "That's what Shakespeare said, and he believed in them and had them in his books, and what's good enough for the greatest American poet is good enough for me."

"Well, I don't believe in them and I'm not afraid of them and I take back what I said about not wanting to meet one. I'd just love to meet one. So there, Billy Hill and Jimmy Garner!" said Frances, stoutly.

The little girls resumed their play with the new found treasure and Jimmy and Billy climbed out on the unfloored rafters to make farther research in the realms of the unknown. Once there was a startled exclamation from one of the boys, but a warning "Hush!" from the other silenced him.

"What you found?" called Frances.

"Nothin' but a ol' rat trap," answered Jimmy, and then he and Billy giggled and

whispered, until Aunt Cindy sent Wilkes Booth Lincoln up to the attic to tell the children to come down and wash up for dinner.

"Where you been all morning, Nicky?" asked Billy. "We been having lots of fun."

"I been a holpin' Aunt Cindy. I ain't honin' none to be havin' fun up in no attic. They's too many ghos'es up in this here attic for me. Even my gran'mammy air scairt ter come up here by herself. She says th' ain't no tellin' what ain't up here. She says ghos'es don't worry white folks like they do colored folks. She says ever sence yo paw's gran'paw come home here one time with a bag er bones when he wa' a studyin' medicine an' she wa'n't nothin' but a little gal that she an' none er the folks on the plantation ain't felt called on ter make no stay up in this here attic."

"A bag of bones!" exclaimed Frances. "A bag of bones couldn't hurt anybody, Nicky. What kind of bones?"

"Folkses' bones! I ain't a sayin' the bones would hurt you but gran'mammy says the pusson what owns those bones mought come back for them. That's what I'm scairt of."

"Well, I reckon they must have come for them long ago," said Frances flippantly. "We haven't found them anywhere and we've poked around in all the corners. You haven't seen anything of a bag of bones, have you, boys?"

"No indeedy!" said Jimmy, but he held up his crossed fingers so Billy could see them. Crossing fingers means that, while you are not exactly telling the truth, what you were telling is not to be counted against you as a lie.

CHAPTER IX

JIMMY GARNER'S PLOT

ILLY and his friends voted that the morning had been a great success, considering that the day was rainy, and all assembled for the two o'clock dinner hungry and happy.

Miss Minerva was much interested in the wax doll. She remembered one she had owned when she was a little girl — one quite similar to the silk clad darling so long buried in the old chest.

"Mine was dressed in blue silk and had a string of pearls around her neck," she said dreamily, a softness in her voice and a suspicion of moisture in her eyes.

"Her name was —" and then Miss Minerva's voice faltered.

"Was what?" asked Lina, eagerly.

The moisture increased in the eyes of her hostess and one little teardrop rolled down her cheek. Lina was seated next to Miss Minerva and she reached over and patted her hand sympathetically. She had never thought of Miss Minerva Major as playing with a doll baby, and now it seemed that she had not only loved her dolly, but that she thought of it tenderly after all these years.

"Oh, Miss Minerva, you are feeling so bad you can't even tell me her name," whispered Lina. "How you must have loved her!"

"No! I never cared much for dolls," said Miss Minerva in a matter of fact voice. "I was pleased to own such a handsome toy. What I am grieved over is that I can't remember the doll's name. I hate to feel that my mind is not as active as it once

was. I never forget names and it is a distinct annoyance to me to forget the name even of a doll."

After dinner Lina said to Frances: "I'm so disappointed. I thought I'd found a point of contact between Miss Minerva and me. When I saw a tear come rolling down her cheek I thought it was about her dolly in the blue silk dress she was weeping over."

"So it was," said Frances.

"But Miss Minerva said —"

"Oh yes, I know what she said but you don't understand Miss Minerva. I do. She and I are kinder alike. Do you think if I got to bawling about something I'd up and 'fess it was what it was? No, indeed! I'd say it was something else and I wouldn't be telling a out-and-out lie either, any more'n Miss Minerva. I'd be so afraid of letting on I was a softy I'd think it was

something else. You oughtn'ter have patted her hand. Miss Minerva's mighty touch-me-notish." Lina nodded her comprehension of this conclusion.

All afternoon the little girls played with the ever youthful, beautiful old doll. Josephine and Deci joined them in the fashioning of fearfully and wonderfully made clothes for the Paris belle. This being a distinctly girlish game, the boys would none of it but went off by themselves.

Miss Minerva always felt that so long as boys were quiet the chances were they were behaving themselves properly, so she concerned herself not at all about Billy and Jimmy, but spent the afternoon reading a missionary paper and writing letters. The Major, on the contrary, always contended that when boys were quiet for any length of time it boded no good. He said

that boys and noise rhymed to some purpose. He was right.

Billy and Jimmy held a whispered conference, as soon as the little girls settled down with the wonderful doll. Then Billy borrowed a sheet from Miss Minerva's well-stocked linen chest. Next, he selected a small saw from Uncle Jupiter's tool box. Meantime Jimmy secured a roll of surgeon's plaster from the medicine closet. Thus equipped, the two boys crept up to the attic and crawled out on the rafters over the room occupied by Lina and Frances.

"Now stick the plaster on, Jimmy, and try to poke it under the laths a little so it will ketch a holt," whispered Billy.

"You needn't be a tellin' me how to do it. I reckon I made up this scheme myself and I reckon I know how to stick ol' plaster onter laths."

"All right," grinned Billy, "jes' stick it tight and then let's wait 'til it's good and dry before we saw the hole. We must saw it kinder jagged like, too, so's it will look like nachel cracks in the ceiling."

Soon the surgeon's plaster was pronounced to have taken firm hold and then, cautiously and painfully, the boys sawed a jagged hole, the boy who was not sawing holding the ends of the surgeon's plaster

to keep the trap door from dropping down into the room beneath.

"It's a good thing that ceiling is papered," whispered Billy. "If it wasn't I reckon the plastering would er dropped all over the bed. Jiminy crickets! Jimmy, I believe it's a gonter work. Look! You can lift the hole right up."

"'Course it's gonter work! Ain't your Uncle Jimmy bossing the job? And didn't I tell you to slant your saw in so's it would kinder bevel the edges and that makes it fit tight and come up easy?"

Billy had been rather pluming himself that the beveled edge idea had been his, but he was willing to let Jimmy have it if it gave him so much satisfaction.

"Look, you kin see plumb down in the girls' room," said Jimmy. "I betcher Lina an' Frances won't be so crazy to meet up with spooks after this. They're all time

sayin' they don't believe things, but wouldn't like to meet 'em, an' then turning around an' sayin' they'd like to see things that they don't believe in. We sure did get this hole right over their bed. I reckon I'm the best guesser 'bout where to make holes they is."

"I reckon you are but I'm some measurer myself," chuckled Billy. "You wanted to make the hole way over yonder."

"Over yonder nothin'! Billy Hill, you're all time thinkin' you are the boss. If you are so smart, s'pose you tie the strings on the skull."

"Huh! All right, but I'm gonter put on gloves before I touch it. I don't care how dry bones are, I don't like to touch 'em. Do you?"

"Oh, I don't mind, but seein' as you are the boss —"

"Aw, cheese it, Jimmy! If we ain't

partners in this business what are we?"

Peace was made and together the boys dragged from between the rafters a bag full of dry bones left there by the great-grandfather — a relic of his medical student days. Evidently he had had some intention of articulating a skeleton. The lower jaw bone had been fastened to the skull by a hinge and some work had been done on the bones of one arm and a leg.

Billy took from the chest of old clothes a pair of lemon colored kid gloves with which he daintily handled the gruesome find. Strings were tied around the skull, passing under the jaw for security, and then the sheet was draped over it, half concealing half revealing the hollow eyes and grinning jaws.

"Gee! Jimmy, it pretty near gives me the creeps," confessed Billy. "I wonder if we oughter scare those girls."

"Of course we oughter, silly! Didn't they say we were 'fraid cats? Didn't they say they weren't 'fraid of nothin'? Didn't they say they were just dying to see spooks? Ain't you their hostess and ain't they your guestes? Ain't it your bounden duty to do all you can to 'muse your comp'ny?"

It was an easy matter to silence Billy's conscience. It would be fun to dangle a skull over the bed of the little girls. They certainly had expressed a desire to meet with a spook. Midnight was chosen as the time for the ghostly visitor.

"Ain't it good luck that Lina's mother's all time spoiled her so she sleeps with a night light in her room?" said Jimmy. "It'll make it easy for her to see Mr. Bony-man. How we gonter wake up at twelve o'clock?"

"I can wake myself up any time I set my mind to," said Billy. "Maje says it's

having mastery over my subway conscious mind. Anyhow, when I go to bed at night if I just say to myself, 'Billy Hill, you are to be Johnny-on-the-spot,' at such and such a time — and there I am!"

"Well, don't wake me up until you wake up yourself," admonished Jimmy.

The children retired early that night. Miss Minerva went into the room occupied by Lina and Frances, presumably to see that her guests wanted for nothing, but she lingered a moment after the little girls were in bed, adjusting the small night lamp so that it would not disturb the sleepers.

Finally, after some hesitation, she said gently: "Lina, my doll baby's name was Belinda. I did love her very much and did feel sad at the thought of her tragic end. Some day I'll tell you about her."

"Yes, ma'm!" was all Lina could say, but she smiled happily into Miss Minerva's

spectacles, as that amiable lady whispered her good-night.

"I tell you after all," whispered Frances after the door was softly closed by their hostess, "Miss Minerva is some peach. She couldn't go to bed with a kind of lie on her conscience. Miss Minerva takes after me a whole lot."

CHAPTER X

MR. BONYMAN'S SURPRISE

THERE was a grandfather's clock on the stairs in Billy's old home that was really a great-great-grandfather's clock, to be strictly genealogical. The first thing the Major had done on his arrival at the plantation was to wind and regulate this clock, and the ancient timepiece took up its duties where it had left off years before. It kept excellent time, but was a little erratic in striking the hours. Like a deaf old gentleman, it occasionally broke into speech when least expected. The Major, who had a passion for clocks and watches, had promised himself the pleasure of looking into this matter as soon as he should return to the plantation. In the meantime,

Gran'pa, as the children called the huge old clock, went on keeping good time and striking when and how he chose.

All that rainy day, during which the children had found so much to interest them in the attic, Gran'pa had not struck at all. He ticked along comfortably and at the hours and half hours cleared his throat, as though he might speak at any moment, and then thought better of it and dozed again.

Billy's "subway conscious" mind did not play him false. In fact, it awakened him at about fifteen minutes before the time ordered. He lay for a moment waiting for Gran'pa to strike, and then remembered that the old gentleman had been silent all day and perhaps his striker had run down.

"Wake up, Jimmy! It's pretty nigh midnight," whispered Billy.

"Midnight much! 'Tain't mo'n nine o'clock. I haven't closed my eyes yet and it couldn't be twelve o'clock," declared Jimmy sleepily.

"Your mouth, you mean. You've been snoring to beat the band. If it ain't twelve it's near enough and if we're gonter do anything we'd better up and do it."

"Gee! Ain't it some night, though?" yawned Jimmy. "Looks like the wind is a gonter knock down the chimbly. It's stopped raining though," he said, peering from the window, "and looka yonder, Billy, there's a moon as big as a barrel. I'd liketer know where that came from. It's most light enough to see without a candle."

"It'll be dark in the attic though, so we'd better take it," and Billy lit the candle and the boys tiptoed softly from their room and started up the dark attic

stairs, clad in the pajamas of which they both were proud.

"I reckon if anybody'd see us now they'd take us for ghosts too," whispered Jimmy. "I wisht we hadn't graduated from nightshirts, Billy, cause pajamas ain't near so ghostified as nightshirts."

"Everything is ghostified enough for me," laughed Billy, as they entered the dark and mysterious attic. "I'm right glad to have on striped pajamas and to feel I'm made out of real boy meat. Ain't old Mr. Bonyman skeerful though?"

The skull, draped in the sheet, was hanging from a beam where the boys had found a convenient nail. The southern windows were still opened, and through them came a chilling wind that shook the ghostly drapery in a way that would have made the boys' hair stand on end had it not already been erect from excitement and

unvoiced apprehension. Neither would confess to the other how "scairt" he felt at that moment.

Billy donned the lemon colored gloves and grasped Mr. Bonyman tightly, after he had carefully placed the candle behind the opened trunk, out of reach of the searching wind. Then together the boys crawled out on the rafters. The surgeon's plaster held fast and the trap door was easily raised.

The glow from the night lamp was drowned by the flood of moonlight that streamed in the window and across the bed where Lina and Frances lay sleeping. The Paris doll was between them, clothed in a nightdress the little girls had fashioned for her.

"Look at Lina an' Frances, playin' dolls in their sleep. I reckon they are going to be pretty scairt in a minute," whispered

Jimmy, as he began stuffing Mr. Bonyman through the hole.

"Be careful, Jimmy! Holt on tight to the string or you'll drop the whole thing down on the girls." Billy crowded close to Jimmy as he spoke.

"I'm being careful, but don't scrouge me."

Mr. Bonyman was let down so that his draperies almost touched the bed. There he hung, swaying gently from the trembling of Jimmy's guiding hand, which tightly grasped the string, and the wind that came through the opened window.

The boys put their heads close together, so both of them could get a view of the stage on which the drama was to be enacted. The little girls slept peacefully. Mr. Bonyman danced a ghostly dance and to Jimmy came an inspiration.

"Give me back my doll! Give me back

my doll!" he cried in a deep sepulchral tone.

Lina stirred and threw a protecting arm over the wax beauty at her side, but Frances did not stir.

"Grrrrh!" growled Jimmy. "Give me back my doll!"

Lina's eyes opened wide. She saw the ghostly visitor.

"Frances! Frances!" she whispered in an agony of fear, at the same time grabbing her bedfellow with a frantic clutch.

"No fair pinching!" muttered Frances, only half awake.

"Give me back my doll! Give me back my doll!" Jimmy's voice changed to a quaver.

Frances would have been as frightened as Lina if it had not been for the bright moonlight that made it possible for her to discern a bold inscription on the hem

of the sheet which was draped around the spectre.

"Minerva Estes," was what Frances read. It was as plain as day. There was a similar marking on the hem of the sheet under which she and Lina were sleeping. When Miss Minerva marked sheets she marked sheets. There was not the least doubt as to who was the owner of those sheets. It was written in bold chirography, in the blackest of black, indelible ink.

Frances's mind worked like a flash. Lina had hardly time to give another pinch before the whole matter was clear to the quick witted little girl.

"Ghosts don't borrow sheets, least of all not Miss Minerva's," Frances decided. She reached up to grab the swaying draperies and at that moment Gran'pa awakened from his long slumber and began a hoarse peal, not in his usual gentle pur-

ring chime, but loud, rapid and raucous. Frances stayed her hand involuntarily while she counted the hour. Rapidly the old clock hurried through the twelve strokes and then, instead of stopping with a guttural croak, as was his custom, he went on and on. The strokes became louder and louder, faster and faster.

Jimmy and Billy had felt a certain satisfaction as the clock began to strike. It meant that their ghost was behaving in the regulation manner, appearing on the stroke of twelve. They nudged each other delightedly. Jimmy ceased demanding return of the doll and counted the strokes in a faint whisper.

"Thirteen, fourteen, fifteen! Listen to that ol' fool clock, Billy. He's way up in the twenties. Whatcher reckon?"

Frances counted twelve and stopped. She had an inspiration. Of course it was

Jimmy and Billy in the attic trying to scare them. To be sure, Mr. Bonyman was a fearsome object to behold, with his wabbly, grinning jaw and his cavernous eyes, but his demand for the doll, though couched in ghostly language and sepulchral tone, sounded very much like Jimmy.

Frances called out shrilly, "Gran'pa's gonter get you, Jimmy. He's a coming! He's a coming! You'd better run. He's on the stairs! He's hollerin' for you! Quick!"

As she screamed, she gave a vicious pull at Mr. Bonyman's draperies.

Jimmy lost his nerve and balance at the same time. He loosened his hold on Mr. Bonyman's strings and clutched wildly at the rafters. The sheeted spook fell in a huddled mass on the foot of the girls' bed and Jimmy's fat legs came crashing through the ceiling. There was a sound of

splintering laths and the thud of falling plastering and then Jimmy's bull like bellow arose, almost drowning the resounding strokes of the clock.

Miss Minerva jumped from her bed and, hastily slipping on a kimono and bedroom slippers, rushed frantically into the hall.

"What's the matter? Where are you? Who is it?"

Aunt Cindy rolled from her downy couch in the room she was occupying behind the kitchen.

"Lawsamussy! That there Jimmy air done did something. Whar air you, Billy? Who's daid? Fire! Fire!" She seized the farm bell and rang it vigorously.

Gran'pa continued to strike and Jimmy to bellow. Indeed it was time to bellow. The fat little boy hung midway between the attic and the chamber floor. His legs

were dangling wildly in the air, while his fat body was wedged in the hole above. Billy found himself weak with laughter. He tugged bravely at Jimmy's arms, but to no avail.

The distracted Miss Minerva rushed wildly up and down the hall, not knowing where to seek for the deafening bellow, when she found the bed in the room occupied by her nephew and his guest vacant. She heard Aunt Cindy's alarm of fire above the ringing of the bell and Gran'pa's persistent strike.

"Josephine! My darling baby! I must get her first and then rescue the other children," she cried.

Josephine was fast asleep, but being a person ever ready for excitement, she awakened immediately and was delighted at the noise that greeted her ears.

"You say it's a fire or something?"

she cried. "Oh, Minerva, I'm gonter help put it out with my little sand bucket." She grasped her tiny red pail and, in spite of her mother's frantic pleadings, stopped to fill it from the china water pitcher on the washstand.

The farm bell aroused the negro quarters, which were not so far away from the mansion but that Jimmy's bellowing was also faintly caught. As the colored occupants rushed one by one from their cabins, they heard Aunt Cindy's cry of fire.

"Git all the buckets an' 'tensils what kin hol' water," commanded Aunt Bluegum Tempy, "an' eveybody begin a totin' water as fas' as you kin run."

In an incredibly short time negroes, old and young, were on their way to the mansion. Gran'pa continued to strike and Jimmy to bellow.

Miss Minerva, dragging Josephine and

her red pail of water, finally made her way to the back porch, where Aunt Cindy was still ringing the bell and gasping: "Fire!"

"The good Gawd save us, Miss Minerva, where's the fire at?"

"I'm gonter put it out with my little bucket," said Josephine confidently.

"I don't believe there is any fire," said Miss Minerva. "Stop ringing that bell, Aunt Cindy, and come with me and find out what is the matter with that Jimmy Garner and where he is."

The mistress spoke sternly, which had the effect of bringing Aunt Cindy to her senses. "Why did you cry fire?" asked Miss Minerva.

"I thought I heard somebody cry fire befo' I ever got ter hollerin'," declared Aunt Cindy.

They hurried back to the house, where again the clamor of the clock and the

frightened cries of Jimmy held full sway.

Lina, who had recovered from her fright caused by Mr. Bonyman, but now really believed that something uncanny had got hold of Jimmy, added to the din. Frances's assertion that Gran'pa was a coming after Jimmy had scared Lina as much as it had Jimmy.

Guided by Lina's shrieks, Miss Minerva and Aunt Cindy hurried to the room occupied by the little girls. Lina had covered her head with the counterpane, only emerging occasionally for air and to give vent to an extra shrill yell. The practical Frances had gone to work to rescue Jimmy, having come to the conclusion that her roly poly playmate had been sufficiently punished and it was woman's part to forgive and forget and, above all, to act.

Jimmy's fat legs were kicking violently and his bellows were as lusty as ever.

"If you just stop your racket, I'll get you out, Jimmy Garner," Frances called. "Stop kicking and let me see how far down your feet come."

Jimmy stopped for a moment and let his quivering limbs hang down.

"It'll take the table and two chairs," said Frances, with the air of a lady deciding how much material it would require for a certain dress pattern. She lifted the three-legged candle stand to the foot of the bed, placed a straight chair on the table and was about to put another chair on top of the pile when the door opened to admit Miss Minerva, Aunt Cindy and little Josephine, still carrying her pail of water.

Miss Minerva took in the situation at a glance. A grim smile played over her features when she saw the fat legs of Jimmy Garner hanging from the ceiling. She looked with approval on the tower of

furniture Frances was erecting beneath the agonized legs.

"Where is Billy?" Miss Minerva asked sternly. "Stop that racket, Jimmy! Stop it immediately!"

Jimmy fell silent in the middle of a bellow.

"Here I am, Aunt Minerva," said Billy meekly. "I'm tryin' to pull Jimmy out."

"Oh, I'll put him out," cried Josephine, still bent on fire and the possibility of extinguishing it with her tiny red pail of water. She ran from the room and swiftly mounted the attic stairs. "I'm comin'! I'm comin'!" she called to Billy.

Frances had miscalculated. The ceilings in the mansion were higher than she dreamed. Two chairs and a table on top of the high four-poster bed were not sufficient to reach the short legs of the unfortunate Jimmy.

"Take them down," commanded Miss Minerva. "Aunt Cindy, go find a step-ladder."

In the meantime, Josephine, still carrying the bucket of water, had reached the attic. Lightly she ran along the rafters and before Billy realized what she was doing she threw the entire contents of her pail on the already sorely afflicted Jimmy.

Part of the contents of the pail soaked Jimmy and the rest fell on the already overtaxed plastering. The cold water shocked Jimmy and softened the plaster. Jimmy loosened his hold on the rafter and the plaster loosened its hold on Jimmy. With a yell of fear he fell into the room below. It was well for him that Frances, obedient to Miss Minerva's command, had removed the pile of table and chairs from the foot of the bed. No doubt they would have broken the fall but they might have

broken Jimmy at the same time. As it was, he made a clean flight, landing in a sitting posture on the great four-poster. Facing him on the foot of the bed was Mr. Bony-man, grinning hideously in spite of his ignominious plight. Jimmy grinned back.

Billy came from the attic on the wings of the wind, with Josephine trotting after him as fast as her short legs would permit.

Aunt Cindy came lumbering up the stairs, dragging the step-ladder, and after her the darkies from the quarters, all of them carrying utensils of various kinds filled with water.

"Whar the fire at?" they demanded.

"It was Jimmy, but I put him out," declared Josephine.

Many and varied were the explanations of the happenings of that night but nobody ever could solve the mystery of the Gran'pa clock and his prolonged strike.

After Billy and Jimmy were safe in their bed, and the old house had resumed its normal state of peace and quiet, Billy began to giggle.

"Say, Jimmy, when your legs were a hanging down in Lina an' Frances's room I reckon you were powerful glad you had graduated from nightshirts."

CHAPTER XI

MR. BONYMAN RESTS IN PEACE

IN retaliation for their midnight prank, Frances and Lina decided to punish Billy and Jimmy. After some discussion, they decided that the boys could best be made to suffer by ignoring them severely. They shrewdly calculated this would be a blow to masculine vanity.

"Billy's gonter feel bad anyhow," said Frances, "but it ain't gonter hurt to make him feel a little worse. Jimmy just hates not to be noticed. That boy'd rather be cut up in little bits than have people not know he's around. Let's play girl plays for two or three days and pretend like we are Josephine's comp'ny. Of course she asked us down here anyhow."

Lina was delighted with the role of scornful one and played it to perfection. She practiced before the mirror being Lady Clara Vere de Vere. She longed to dress the part, but Frances thought it might make the joke turn on her, so she gave that up. Frances decided to act no part at all, but just be herself and pretend that she was not aware of the boys' presence.

"I reckon I'll make out they are ghosts and I can see through them. When they talk I'll behave like I can't hear them. That'll get them goin' all right."

Miss Minerva hardly knew how to deal with the culprits. If Billy alone had been implicated, she could have humbled him by making him stay in bed all day, but she felt that she could not punish Billy without including Jimmy, who was, she felt sure, the ringleader of the mischief. Nothing would have given Miss

Minerva more pleasure than the paddling of naughty Jimmy, whose plumpness invited chastisement, but she considered it would be a great mistake for her to take upon herself the correction of a neighbor's child. She decided to await the Major's arrival. He was sure to come back to the plantation in a day or so.

"Those bones must be buried, however," Miss Minerva told Aunt Cindy. "They have caused trouble enough."

"Ain't it the truf? But who's gwine ter conduct the fumeral, Miss Minerva? Th' ain't ary nigger on this here plantation who'd tech them human bones. They's too much hoodoo in human bones. Niggers is scairt they mought be charms an' spells in 'em."

"Nonsense! Send your husband to me," commanded Miss Minerva.

"I kin call him, Miss Minerva, but I

tell you now we alls mought jes' as well save our bref. Jupiter ain't gonter fool with no human bones. Sis Blue-gum Tempy's pretty nigh the bes' layer out of corpses in these parts but she ain't gonter tech them either. Didn't you see how them niggers backed out er the room las' night when they seed that there bony haid a grinnin' at 'em? They done tuck a notion that the ol' clock got a strikin' 'cause of them there boys a foolin' with those bones."

"Do you mean to tell me there are no negro men on the place who will bury those bones?" asked the mistress sternly.

"Yas'm," nodded Aunt Cindy solemnly.

"Well, then, send for Mr. Hopkins. Those bones are to be buried, if I have to bury them myself."

Mr. Hopkins came and with him Mrs. Hopkins. The children got wind of the purport of the visit and decided to be on

hand in case of interesting developments possibly in store.

They had met Mr. Hopkins and made friends with him, but this was their first encounter with Mrs. Hopkins. Mr. Hopkins they had liked from the moment they saw his long, lean, humorous countenance that looked, as Billy said, like Abraham Lincoln without any whiskers. He was, as Aunt Tempy said, slow to move but his expression was indicative of a kind heart and his gentle drawling words were full of love and sympathy, no matter what the subject matter might be.

Mrs. Hopkins was a poetess — not that she often wrote verse but, as she declared, she lived and breathed poetry. She was slender and willowy, with big, black eyes always suffused with moist emotion. She carried her head on one side and walked with a mincing step. No doubt in her youth

she had been pretty and even now there was a certain graceful charm about her, in spite of her affectations.

If Miss Minerva had not been a changed Miss Minerva, due to the Major's softening influence, she would have snorted her disapproval of any woman's putting on such silly airs, but being a changed Miss Minerva, she only pressed her lips quite firmly together and greeted her visitors with a stony expression.

Mr. Hopkins had come to the plantation in the capacity of overseer after Billy had gone to live with his Aunt Minerva, so he and his wife were strangers to the youthful heir of the estate.

"And this is little Prince Charming!" exclaimed Mrs. Hopkins, when Billy went forward dutifully to speak to her. "If you only had curls!" she cooed.

Billy blushed furiously and stammered,

"I have got 'em, but I don't wear 'em. I'd rather be bald-headed any day."

"Only fancy!" gushed Mrs. Hopkins. "And Mrs. Estes, are all of these other children yours? What precious dears! How close together they are! Almost twins, these little girls must be! Ah, my children are all dream children."

"Well, if these were all mine they would be nightmares," declared Miss Minerva, thereby perpetrating her first joke, according to the children, who laughed delightedly.

Lina and Frances even forgot for the moment to be scornful of the culprits and actually nudged Billy and Jimmy in the ribs and returned their winks, but Lady Clara Vere de Vere remembered herself in time to pretend there was something in her eye and she was not really winking at all.

Josephine, whose sense of humor was

keen, embraced her mother fervently, exclaiming: "Oh, Minerva, you sounded just like Daddy!"

Mrs. Hopkins was not at all taken aback by Mrs. Estes's brusqueness, but smiled sadly and continued:

"I wish these dear little girls would come see me. I am afraid the boys would find me a dull companion, but I am sure I can interest the little girls as they interest me."

Lina and Frances were sure of it too, and promised to come immediately and bring Josephine.

Miss Minerva changed the subject without apology and, in as few words as possible, informed Mr. Hopkins of the task before him.

"Those bones must be buried, and buried immediately," she said.

"Ya-as'm," drawled Mr. Hopkins, "but

I reckon I'll have to get a burial permit before I can undertake the job."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Miss Minerva.

"Ya-as'm, so it is, but the law is the law, and I'm a law abidin' citizen."

"But those bones have been in this attic for three generations, according to the oldest negroes on the plantation. Surely a burial permit will not be necessary. They may not even belong to the same — er — er — person. We don't even know the sex of — of — "

"The dear departed," suggested Mr. Hopkins, with a twinkle in his eye. "It won't take long to get a permit, Mrs. Estes, because I happen to be a magistrate and I can fix one up in no time. What name shall I give the deceased?"

"His name's Mr. Bonyman," put in Jimmy. "Billy 'n me's christened him that."

"A very good name," drawled Mr. Hopkins. "What Christian name?" he asked, producing from his pocket a fountain pen and the necessary blanks for a burial certificate.

"We didn't give him any first name," said Billy, "but I think John is a good, safe name."

"Sure it is," agreed Mr. Hopkins, "and I think I'll add a middle name. How about John Doe Bonyman?"

It was decided that John Doe Bonyman was an excellent name for the bag of bones, and Mr. Hopkins then made out the burial permit in due form.

"Er — where shall the interment take place?" he asked Miss Minerva.

"I don't know. It is a matter of small importance," said Miss Minerva, who was becoming weary of so much talk about a bag of old dry bones.

"In the family buryin' ground, of course," said Billy. "Uncle Snake-bit Bob says th' ain't been anybody buried there for mos' a hundred years. I reckon my folks wouldn't mind if poor ol' John Doe Bony-man was put along side of 'em."

Miss Minerva quickly assented to this plan.

The funeral procession wended its solemn way through the pasture, skirting the woods to the last resting place of many a dead and gone Hill. The graveyard was at the edge of a field, where many different crops had been planted, but the plough had always given the walled plot a wide berth. A gnarled yew tree stood like an aged sentinel at one corner. Graves and wall were covered with ivy. Even the stones were covered with the thick, dark green mantle, only here and there gleaming forth in marble spots.

Mr. and Mrs. Hopkins headed the procession in their dilapidated buggy, with the bag of bones. The children followed, forming what Lina called the "funeral corsage." Their colored friends viewed the obsequies from afar. They devoutly hoped that the awesome bones would lose their power for evil after they were buried, but certainly they had no idea of coming close enough to test their potency until they were safely under ground.

Lina remembered having seen, in the trunk where the wax doll was discovered, a black lace scarf and a crepe veil of such length that it must have reached to the hem of some poor widow's skirts. Before the procession started, while Billy was still begging his Aunt Minerva to allow them to attend the funeral and was just coming to the part of the argument where he plainly put it that it was her duty even

to make them go since they had been the means of disturbing the poor man's or woman's bones, Lina had whispered to Frances and the two little girls had flown up in the attic for the black garments. They also pulled out of the trunk some black rosettes. They hid the things in their sunbonnets, producing them after the road made a turn by the wood. Lina then swathed herself in the veil, Frances draped the lace scarf over her bobbed hair and Jimmy and Billy patiently submitted to having black rosettes pinned on their sleeves.

" Josephine is too young for first mourning, but here, darling, let me pin this little bunch of wild violets on your dress. Violets are a sign of second mourning and that would be quite 'proprate for an infanticide," said Lina.

Mrs. Hopkins viewed the outward mani-

festation of mourning with sad approval.

"Mis' Hopkins' eyes look 'zactly like the stewed prunes we useter get every day at Mrs. Flint's bo'din' house that time when Sarah Jane got sick an' laid up a whole month so's to get even with her insurance comp'ny," said Jimmy in a loud whisper.

"Now, Jimmy, I think she is real nice," declared Lina.

"She may be nice enough," said Billy, "but what business had she a puttin' her head on one side an' callin' me Prince Charming? Curls, your grandmother! I like her old man though. I wisht he'd tell me some of the jokes he's all time most laughing at."

Arriving at the burial ground, Mr. Hopkins took a spade from the back of his buggy and began solemnly to dig a grave. He viewed the children's mourning with a twinkle in his eyes and a twitching of

his close-shut mouth. He said never a word, but dug diligently while his wife and the children stood by, silently watching him.

"I reckon that's deep enough," he said, when he had gone down about a foot.

"Plenty!" said Billy.

The bag of bones was lifted from the buggy and in short order Mr. Hopkins covered them up, and then with dexterous spankings with his spade shaped a neat mound. He then straightened up and looked inquiringly at his wife.

"In the absence of a preacher, I'll make a few remarks," that lady said, her head very much on one side and her stewed prune eyes damper and sweeter than ever. Lina and Frances clasped their hands and bowed their heads devoutly, while Billy and Jimmy began to regret having come to the funeral of John Doe Bonyman.

Mrs. Hopkins' voice was soft and impassioned. Mr. Hopkins got out his handkerchief, and for a moment the children thought he was going to weep. He held it in front of his face for a moment. Lina was sure he had wiped off a tear, but Billy was equally sure he wiped off a smile.

Mrs. Hopkins raised her eyes to the summer skies and gave voice to the following verses:

Tell me not, in mournful numbers,
  Life is but an empty dream!
For the soul is dead that slumbers,
  And things are not what they seem.

Life is real! Life is earnest!
  And the grave is not its goal;
Dust thou art to dust returnest
  Was not spoken of the soul.

"These poor bones were once a man or woman or maybe both," said Mrs. Hopkins, after reciting the verses. "It is meet

and right that they should have a Christian burial. We will now sing a hymn. What hymn do you little ones know that we could all sing together, that would be appropriate for this solemn occasion?"

She turned to Billy for answer.

"I reckon this one will do," said Billy solemnly, "and all of us know it." He whispered to Jimmy, who passed the word on to Lina and Frances and then their childish voices were raised in the following:

These bones gon' rise agin,
Christian spirut's never daid,
Hit 'em in the jaw!
Knock 'em in the haid!
These bones gon' rise agin,
I know it!
'Deed I know it!
Sisters I know it! Whew!
Brothers I know it! Whew!
Hit 'em in the jaw!
Knock 'em in the haid!
These bones gon' rise agin,
An' come togither in the mornin'!
These bones gon' rise agin,

These bones gon' rise agin,
These bones gon' rise agin,
An' come togither in the mornin'.

The "hymn" that the children sang was one that Jimmy and Billy had learned in the negro quarters and taught to Frances and Lina. The children all felt that it gave a very impressive conclusion to Mr. Bonyman's funeral.

CHAPTER XII

MRS. HOPKINS ENTERTAINS

HE interment of the mortal remains of Mr. Bonyman having been successfully accomplished, Lina and Frances suddenly remembered that they were not on speaking terms with Billy and Jimmy.

Lina resumed her Clara Vere de Vere pose and Frances made Jimmy excessively uncomfortable by looking through him. They had declared a truce, as it were, while they buried their dead. Now the silent warfare was to be resumed.

The little girls decided to take advantage of the invitation and to call on Mrs. Hopkins. That lady was much pleased and told them to get into the buggy with her, as Mr. Hopkins had business to at-

tend to on the plantation and she intended to drive over later on for him. Josephine was urged to be of the party, but she had espied her faithful Deci from afar and much preferred her company.

Billy and Jimmy looked on a little ruefully as Lina and Frances climbed to the buggy seat beside their new friend. It was not that they wanted to call on Mrs. Hopkins, but they felt they might at least be invited.

"I wish Maje would come on home," sighed Billy. "It looks like all the women folks is got their backs up 'bout us."

"Yes, an' Lina's got her nose up 'bout a mile in the air an' Frances's all time makin' out she can see things on the other side of me," growled Jimmy. "What we gonter play anyhow? Looks like th' ain't nothin' to play down in this ol' country."

"Well, nobody's sittin' on your head

keepin' you here," answered Billy. "I'm gonter go an' get 'The Pathfinder' I found in the attic yesterday an' read all day. You can have 'Sanford and Merton.' Aunt Minerva says it's real edifyin'."

"I betcher it's goody goody then," grumbled Jimmy. "Don't let's read, Billy. 'Tain't no fun."

"Let's read a little while an' maybe something jimdandy will come to us to do. We had sech a 'citin' day yesterday that a funeral is a big let-down," observed William Green Hill.

Jimmy agreed and the boys got their books and, lying on their stomachs at the end of the porch, they settled themselves to read until something more exciting might suggest itself.

In the meantime, Lina and Frances were playing "Lady-Come-to-See" with Mrs. Hopkins. Mrs. Hopkins did not know her

guests were engaged in a game. She had played it so long herself that it had become part of her life and she had long ago ceased to look upon it as a game.

As they jogged along the country road in the lop-sided buggy with its mud splashed wheels and torn flaps, they conversed in studied phrases. Mrs. Hopkins drove the steady old horse with reins slack and far apart and hands high in the air. When it became necessary to turn the stubborn steed from the middle of the road, in order that other vehicles might pass, she pulled so violently on the right rein that she always managed to hit Lina, who sat in the middle, on the nose.

"Pardon me!" she always said, and Lina always said: "Not at all!" although she got rather tired of being hit in the same place, and tried to be on her guard and duck in time when she saw that Mrs.

Hopkins was preparing to pull on the right rein.

Mrs. Hopkins was truly sorry to inconvenience her charming young visitor and determined to do better. The next time the horse must be turned, she remembered to lower her hand, hoping at least that if Lina must be hit it would not be in the nose. At the same time, Lina ducked and the blow fell with great force on her much abused feature.

"I beg you to forgive me!" said Mrs. Hopkins.

"You're welcome!" gasped Lina, but her eyes were full of tears and she put her hand to her nose, sure it must be bleeding. She looked appealingly to Frances, who was ever ready with suggestions.

"Mrs. Hopkins, please let me drive," begged Frances. "What's your horse's name?"

"Pegasus — that's what I call him."

"Doesn't Mr. Hopkins call him that, too?"

"Oh, no! You see, Orlando is more matter of fact than I am. He says if he calls him Pegasus he will have to call him Peg for short, and since he is a he and not a she, he'd kick over the traces if he should give him a she name. He finally compromised on Gus. Orlando is so droll."

"I didn't know Mr. Hopkins's name was Orlando," said Frances, who was handling the reins as Billy had taught her in driving Brownie. "How romantic it sounds!"

"I am so glad you think so," beamed Mrs. Hopkins. "It is the name I call him by. He doesn't like it much, but Orlando is such a kind man he lets me do anything I want to. His real name is just plain Sam. I am singularly sensitive to names and I just can't stand one with no poetry

at all in it. He says Sam has more rhymes to it than Orlando. He mentioned one very profane one. I try to make him see that there is an unrhymed poetry the soul craves and mine is unsatisfied unless my life partner has a name to which my being vibrates. I gave him his choice between Orlando and Pygmalion. He said there was small choice between rotten apples, but he believed Orlando was better than Pygmalion, because it was too easy to make Pig out of Pygmalion."

"I think Orlando is beautiful," sighed Lina, whose nose was feeling better, not having been hit for some time. "What is your name, Mrs. Hopkins?"

"My parents named me Lizzie Mattie, after my two grandmothers, but when I came to years of discretion and was about sixteen, I changed my name to Elspeth Mathilde."

"Does Orlando call you all that?" asked Frances.

"No, he calls me Mat, but whenever he says Mat I say to myself, 'Elspeth Mathilde,' and in that way we get along pretty well."

The Hopkinses' house was close to the road. It was a four-room cottage, with a pleasant, shady yard and flower beds bordering the walks and vines covering the small porch.

"Come right in," said the hospitable Elspeth Mathilde. "Sit down in the parlor and I will serve five o'clock tea."

The fact that it was only half past ten in the morning did not strike guests or hostess as being any reason why they should not have five o'clock tea.

While Mrs. Hopkins went to the kitchen to put on the kettle the little girls examined delightedly the treasures of her parlor. It

was indeed a wonderful room. The principal ornamentation struck the visitors as being buttons. Strings of them looped back curtains, were festooned from picture

to picture, formed pendants on chandelier and candelabra and bordered lambrequin and tidies. Most of them were glass buttons of all sizes, shapes and colors. Oc-

casionally there was one of jet, brass or mother-of-pearl, but no common bone buttons were to be seen.

"I have been collecting buttons ever since I was a little girl," Mrs. Hopkins explained, as she came in bearing a tray with the tea things. "I am still collecting, but buttons aren't as pretty as they used to be. They don't string as well — these flat ones that we wear now-a-days. The kettle will boil in a moment and we will have tea. Won't you sit down?"

Mrs. Hopkins indicated a chair near the window for Lina.

It was a large carved chair, upholstered in shiny red pantasote. Lina obediently sat down. Immediately the room was filled with music. Mrs. Hopkins smiled happily and Lina and Frances cried, "Oh!"

Lina jumped up and the music ceased. She resumed her seat and the tune, which

was "Home, Sweet Home," continued with many flourishes and variations.

"To think of owning a musical chair!" sighed Lina, settling herself contentedly, with a delighted feeling that she was responsible for the sweet strains issuing from beneath the upholstery.

The tune was finished. There was a slight pause, during which the little girls eyed their hostess.

"Let me try now," begged Frances. Lina was reluctant to move.

"In a minute! Let me stay while it plays another. It's going to begin now. What will this tune be, Mrs. Hopkins?"

Frances pouted a bit. Lina was selfish sometimes. There was no doubt about it. She ought to take turns. The tune started and Frances' pout changed into a broad grin. There were no words to the songs sung by this musical chair, but the tune

was one with which both of the children were quite familiar:

> Everybody works but Father.
> He sits around all day,
> Feet in front of the fire,
> Smoking his pipe of clay.

Lina blushed. "You can have it now, Frances."

"Thanks, awfully, but that tune doesn't suit me. That sittin' around all day is more your style. I tell you, I'll sit in with you and that will make it go faster."

The repertoire of the musical chair was soon exhausted and the little girls turned their attention to other wonders of the room, Mrs. Hopkins delightedly explaining all the mysteries.

"That is a footstool," she said, pointing to an article of furniture near the wondrous chair. It was a small saw-horse which had

been gilded. Across it lay a large rolling-pin upholstered in red plush.

"How lovely!" cried Frances. "Who made it?"

"I did, my own self," purred Mrs. Hopkins.

In a moment Lina discovered another treasure. "Oh, look, Frances," she cried. "Ain't it cute to have a snow scene painted on a shovel? I'm going to learn to paint and do one like this for my mother. I just love to gild things." Lina's eyes rolled up in an ecstacy of admiration.

The next thing to claim their attention and enthusiasm was a frying pan with a fish painted on its black surface. The fish had a very knowing look in its far from fishlike eye. Frances remarked on this, declaring the eye followed her around, like one of the portraits her mother owned.

"That is because I copied its eye from

a painting of Orlando's mother," explained Mrs. Hopkins. "I always make up all my scenes in painting, but somehow when I was doing that fish I couldn't seem to remember just how a fish's eye looked, so I just copied one from the human eye. It is a very good thing I did, because Orlando says that every time he forgets and starts to knock his pipe out in that painted frying pan he sees his mother looking at him and stops."

The little girls laughed delightedly and agreed with their hostess that it was an excellent thing to have put the eye of her mother-in-law in the sacred pan.

"And that is my memory ball," said Mrs. Hopkins, in answer to a questioning look from the children as they stood by a great shapeless gilt mass, suspended from the corner of the mantel-piece.

"Oh, please tell us about it!"

"Well, first I took a hornets' nest. Of course you can make one of rags stuffed into a denim bag, but the hornets' nest is part of my memories because my first sweetheart gave it to me."

"Not Mr. Orlando?"

"Oh, no, it was before him. Then, after I got the hornets' nest, I began to save things of significance and stick them on with glue, or pins if they are soft things. Then I gilded all of it. Now this is a shaving that came from the first house Orlando and I lived in when I was a bride. I have great feeling about that shaving. Didn't it gild pretty?"

The little girls agreed it had, and begged for more information about the memory ball.

"This is a pine cone I picked up one day when I was walking with a gentleman friend, whom I might have chosen to be my

Orlando except that his eyes were crossed, and when he made love to me I felt somehow he was addressing someone else. Otherwise he was very charming. That pine cone is all that I have to remind me of him.

"This is part of a turkey wish-bone I pulled with a girl friend. I got the long part, but we couldn't decide whether that meant the first husband or not. Anyhow, I got the first and so I put the bone on my memory ball."

Many and various were the treasures stuck to the magic ball — magic because one glance at it brought back to the mind of the owner delights of the past. In the meantime, the kettle was boiling vigorously and the hostess flew to the kitchen to brew the tea. Lina and Frances were not allowed to drink real tea at home, but they felt it would be decided breach in etiquette to

inform Mrs. Hopkins of this. With the aid of much sugar and cream they were able to swallow the strong green tea, while they munched little heart shaped cookies. Mrs. Hopkins explained she always made her cookies heart shaped.

While tea was in progress the kind woman explained to her entranced callers the mystery of "spatter work," many examples of which art were in evidence in her parlor.

"Don't many folks know how to do it now-a-days, but I cling to the good old things. My grandmother taught me how to do spatter work and many a beautiful picture I have made with it. First, you gather ferns — as many varieties as you can find — and then you press them with great care in graceful clusters. When they are quite dry you place a cluster on a sheet of heavy paper of any color you desire. Green is

tasty, but Granny always stuck to white. She thought it was more refined than green.

"When you make spatter work you must wear gloves. Now you take a fine tooth comb and a tooth brush and some ink. You fill the tooth brush with ink and spatter it through the fine tooth comb right down on the paper where your ferns are. But be sure not to let your cluster shift at all. It must be quite firmly held. You spatter and spatter until your paper is all over little dots and then you lift up your cluster of ferns and there is your picture, every fern leaf just as natural as can be."

"Oh how lovely!" cried the little girls. "We are going to make some."

"Now this is another art that my grandmother taught me," continued the smiling Mrs. Hopkins, pointing to a vase full of dried grasses.

"Oh, Lina, look at the dewdrops still

on the grass!" cried Frances. "How did you keep them, Mrs. Hopkins?"

"That is the art. I will tell you the secret. You take some powdered alum and make a solution with warm water. Then you sprinkle it all over your grasses and it dries in clear drops."

"Goodness, ain't we learnin' a lot?" said the appreciative Frances. "Did you make these pictures, too, dear Mrs. Hopkins?"

"Yes, indeed! I have saved them for the last. First let me show you the spider web I crocheted. I know you saw it and thought I was a poor housekeeper and left spider webs in my parlor. I am not that careless, I can assure you."

An artificial web was stretched from a vase of paper flowers to one of dried grasses. It was duly admired by the visitors.

"These pictures I painted, or rather built, myself when I had never had a lesson in my life," rattled on Mrs. Hopkins. "I just made up this way of doing it. Now this one of the old mill was the first one and I believe I think it is the best of all, because my soul was fired with enthusiasm all the time I was making it. First, I took a picture of an old mill and traced the outline on a piece of canvas. Then I got tree bark and cut it exactly the right shape and glued it on for the mill and the tree trunks. Then I took some moss and dried it and dyed it different colors of green for the grass and the leaves on the trees. I matched Heaven's own blue exactly with ordinary blueing, but the fleecy clouds are made with soft cotton — also the foaming torrent that dashes over the mill wheel. I know you'd never guess what the rocks are made of."

"Never!" gasped Lina, in open eyed wonder and admiration. "They look kinder like rocks, but you never could have made real rocks stick so tight."

"Exactly! The rocks were quite a problem to me, but I solved the difficulty when I thought of chewing gum."

"Chewing gum! Oh, Mrs. Hopkins, you must have chewed up a whole box to make so many and such big rocks!" said Frances.

"Yes, it took a sight of chewing gum, but I got some little friends in to help me, and we made quite a chewing gum party. The only trouble was one little girl got eight pieces in her mouth all at once and she cried when she had to give it up. She wanted to show her brother what she was capable of and insisted upon taking the whole huge hunk home with her."

"I'm gonter make one just like that for

my mother," declared Lina.

"Me too!" chimed in Frances, "but I'm gonter do all the chewing myself."

By this time the tea and cookies had all been consumed, and Lina and Frances felt it was time to bid their kindly hostess farewell. Before they departed, Mrs. Hopkins made them promise to come again soon.

CHAPTER XIII

AT THE OLD HAUNTED TREE

ILLY and Jimmy found the reading party on the porch rather slow sport. Billy was enjoying "The Pathfinder," but Jimmy found "Sanford and Merton" dull reading.

"They don't never come to nothin'," he grumbled. "Jes' preachin' all the time. 'Tain't no fun, Billy. Let's go do something. Lina an' Frances think they're so smart, all the time a callin' on silly ol' women with they heads on one side an' they eyes lookin' like stewed prunes."

"Well, what let's do?" asked Billy, reluctantly closing his book.

"Let's go somewhere — somewhere

'tain't fit for girls to go," retorted Jimmy darkly.

"I tell you what!" cried Billy, jumping up from the porch floor. "Let's go see what's in that hollow tree up there on the dividing line between the plantation and Mr. Gale's place. You know — that tree Fust and Git tried to make us scairt about."

"Bully! That wouldn't be no fit place for girls to go an' we can come home an' tell 'em what fun we had. Girls are all time so stuck on theyselves," said Jimmy excitedly.

"Let's get Wilkes Booth Lincoln," suggested Billy. But the little colored boy was picking chickens for Aunt Cindy, and when he got through with that job there were peas to shell for dinner and various and sundry other duties. When Wilkes Booth Lincoln learned where Billy and

Jimmy were going, he openly declared he would rather shell peas and peel potatoes than be of any party going to visit the haunted tree.

"That there tree am ha'nted, Billy, an' I should think arfter las' night an' the carryin's on er that ol' clock you'n Jimmy'd be scairt ter be a monkeyin' roun' with ha'nts. Some says the do' ter the bad place is down in that there ol' tree," said the little colored boy.

Billy laughed. "Well, Nicky, if the ha'nts don't hurt us any worse than they did last night I reckon we can stand it. The only damage I can see that was done is the hole in the ceiling and I believe Lina an' Frances'll just move to another room. They are certainly plenty of rooms down here on the plantation."

So the white boys started on their expedition, while Wilkes Booth Lincoln con-

tinued to make the feathers fly from the frying-size chickens.

"Aunt Cindy," he ventured, "do you think Billy's changed kinder here lately?"

"Changed how?"

"Well, some er the black folks is sayin' he don't talk the way he useter. They say he useter be down right niggerfied in his talk an' now he kinder talks like the Major an' Miss Minerva."

"Co'se he do. Whatcher 'spec' from 'ristocratical Hills? Billy ain't gonter stan' still. What his goin' ter school gonter do fer him if'n he jes' goes on bein' niggerfied? But see here, you nigger boy, don't you think goin' ter school fer you am' the same as it is fer white folks. You try an' put on airs with yo' talk an' you'll hear from me."

"Yes ma'm!"

"What you say? You say yas'm the

way you been brung up ter say. Don't you let me hear you sayin' yes ma'm ter me."

"No ma'm," said Wilkes Booth Lincoln, at the same time registering a mental note that he too would endeavor to improve in his speech and be more like Billy.

The hollow tree stood up gaunt and black. A crow was perched on its topmost branch and a buzzard was circling around overhead as Billy and Jimmy approached.

"Gee! It's powerful gloomy looking," said Billy, "but I'm no more afraid of ha'nts than I am of the flabby man Lina an' Frances useter talk about."

"Me neither," echoed Jimmy. "I ain't sayin' I'd like to come here on the thirteenth of May if it happens to come on Friday, though. People say you all time get bad luck on that day.'

"Whatcher r e c k o n the buzzard's after?" asked Billy.

"I don't know, but it ain't gonter be after me, I betcher, 'cause I'm gonter keep a movin' so steady he ain't never gonter take me for dead an' rotten an' forgotten," retorted Jimmy.

The boys climbed the rail fence that divided the Gale place from the Hill plantation and approached the tree from the other side.

"The hollow part is on Mr. Gale's side," explained Billy. The tree marked the dividing line on the upland. The fence ran straight across the pasture and down the hill to a little brook. To the north of the brook the land belonged to the Gales, to the south, to the Hills.

"It's funny there's a kinder path goin' to the tree, when Fust said all the folks around were afraid to go near it," pondered Billy.

"Maybe it's the devil's path," sug-

gested Jimmy. "I don't see any hoof marks though."

"I reckon the devil covers his hoofs up with boots when he comes a callin'," laughed Billy. "Are you scairt, Jimmy?"

"Scairt your grandmother! I'm a gonter git in that hollow tree an' if I find a door goin' down to the bad place I'm gonter go an' call on the bad man."

"Huh! I see you doin' it! Fact is, I dare you to," taunted Billy.

"I dare you to, too," cried Jimmy. "Dare, dare, double dare! If you take a dare you'll steal a copper cent off a dead man's eye."

Billy laughed. "I ain't never taken a dare yet, leastways I've done my best not to. I was gonter go as far down in the tree as I could get all the time, 'thout a dare."

Tiptoeing on their bare feet, the boys

neared the tree. The crow in its branches gave a hoarse caw and flew away. The buzzard swooped low and then sailed off across the world.

"I wish I could fly," whispered Billy.

"Maybe you can when you git through a foolin' with this devil's tree," sniggered Jimmy.

"How about you? I dared you before you dared me," said Billy.

"But I double dared you. You all time takin' a dare, Billy Hill."

"Yes I am!" scornfully. "I liketer know when a double dare gotter be mo'n a dare when the dare came first. I ain't carin' though, Jimmy Garner. I'm a goin' first. You can jes' keep to heel."

"You talk like I'm a dog," blustered Jimmy.

Billy laughed. "Aw come off, Jimmy! If this is a devil tree, an' the devil is near

by, I reckon it would give him lots of fun to hear us a quarrelin'. Look here, Jim! I'm blessed if there ain't a kind of door to this tree. This is a plank with bark nailed on it to fool folks and, jimminy crickets, if there ain't a strap for openin' it with!"

"Say, Billy, I take back my double dare if you're scairt," said Jimmy magnanimously.

"I ain't scairt a whoop an' I wouldn't stop now if I was sure the bad man was gonter get me. Fact is, I'm sure he ain't," and Billy laughed bravely. He gave a tug at the rusty old strap that was nailed to the board. "It's powerful tight. Ketch a holt, Jim, an' let's pull together."

Their combined efforts moved the improvised door and moved it with a suddenness that upset the boys and gave them both sharp raps on their heads.

"Ouch! Some devil in that door," de-

clared Jimmy, picking himself up and rubbing his crown.

The boys peered cautiously into the hollow depths. It was something of a relief to them to find no underground passage or gruesome go-down, but only the black emptiness of a lightning struck tree. They crept into the opening.

"What's this?" said Billy, spying something white sticking out from under a boulder that lay in the center of the hollow. He pushed aside the boulder.

"Jimminy crickets! Jim Garner, here's a ten dollar bill and a letter!"

"Golly Moses! Lemme outer here," cried the dauntless Jimmy. "What does the letter say, Billy?"

"It's written mighty funny, but I reckon I can make it out. 'Leve me won gal.' Look, Jimmy, he spells 'leave' without any a, and 'one' with a w, and 'girl,' gal."

"I reckon he spells like the devil," said Jimmy, trembling a bit in spite of himself.

"But I always thought the devil was highly educated," objected Billy. "I don't believe it's got a thing to do with the devil."

"Anyhow, it's a mighty good thing we didn't bring along Lina an' Frances. The bad man is writing somebody for a gal but I wouldn't 'zactly like him to get Lina an' Frances, but I betcher Frances would keep him a guessin'. I wouldn't pay ten dollars for any ol' gal in the world. Whatcher gonter do with the money, Billy?"

"I'm gonter put it back under that rock along with the note and I'm gonter go somewheres else. I don't know whose ten spot it is, but I know mighty well it ain't our'n and we haven't got any girls for sale. Look at this little picture or something

down in the corner of the letter kinder like it was a signature, Jimmy. Whatcher reckon it is?"

Billy held up a crude drawing of a triangle, in which were two vertical marks above one horizontal line.

"Billy, let's get outer here. I'm scairt. That there is the picture of the devil," urged Jimmy. "You think it's nothin' but a triangle with three marks on it, but I know it's the devil, horns and all, with eyes and a mouth."

"Th' ain't any nose," objected Billy.

"That makes no diffunce! Looks like the devil to me," and Jimmy backed out of the hollow tree. Billy followed, glad to get back in the sunshine.

Carefully the boys fitted the door into place and then turned and ran down the path by the fence.

"Whew! He pretty nigh got us that

time," panted Jimmy when finally they sank exhausted in the shade of a thicket of wild plums that had sprung up in the line of the dividing fence.

Billy looked solemn.

"What's matter?" demanded Jimmy.

"Nothin', but I wish I hadn't a run away. Maje never, never would a run."

"Pooh! I reckon he would if he wasn't all time so old an' fat. He ran away from your billy goat that time he got butted. I know he did, 'cause how come he got butted in the back if he wasn't runnin' away?"

"Maybe!" assented Billy, somewhat comforted. "That sign on that note looked kinder like my old goat used to look."

"Well, your goat sure did resemble the bad man in disposition," grinned Jimmy. "I reckon they look alike, too."

"It certainly is hot here," said Billy.

"How about trotting down to the brook under the hill an' splashin' around some? 'Tain't big enough to swim in. I promised Maje I wouldn't go swimmin' 'thout some grown-up. Not this year anyway."

CHAPTER XIV

UNCLE JUPITER'S ESCAPE

BILLY and Jimmy followed the path beside the fence across the hot fields until they came to a thickly wooded knoll, where an outcropping of stone formed a little bluff overlooking the valley cut by the brook of which Billy had spoken. This valley was covered with a dense undergrowth, studded here and there with huge sycamore trees. Neither the Hills nor the Gales had ever been able to utilize this land, because of the fact that it was constantly being flooded. The stream of water, innocent enough ordinarily, could, with little warning, turn itself into a raging torrent and then as quickly subside. The recent rains had caused it to rise beyond its

banks but it had gone back to its normal state. From the bluff above the boys could see the brook gliding along between the great sycamores and under the thick growth of alders.

"It looks mighty muddy, but it will be wet," said Billy. "Let's sit down up here on the rocks and cool off some. It's mighty bad to go swimmin' or even splashin' when you are as sweaty as we are."

The boys settled themselves on a mossy ledge and gazed listlessly down into the valley below.

"I see a curl of smoke down yonder," said Billy, "and I certainly do smell a funny smell."

"You all time thinking you're smellin' things, Billy Hill. I can't see smoke an' I can't smell a smell."

"There! Can't you see that smoke, over

yonder where a big tree has fallen over and got caught on the other tree? I'd sho' like to crawl up that tree an' git up in the other one. It would be lots of fun."

"Yes, I see the smoke now," said Jimmy. "I kin pretty nigh smell the smell."

"Let's go see what the fire is," suggested Billy. "We can keep along up on this hill and not go down in the bottom yet."

"I'm game!" agreed Jimmy. "What does the smell smell like? Is it a good smell? I wisht I could smell things the way you can, Billy."

"I get a lot of fun outer smellin'. I always did. This smell ain't precisely good but it ain't bad either. It's kinder like salt risin' bread. You wouldn' 'zactly want it on your han'kcher for church an' still it ain't the kinder smell that'll make you holt your nose," explained Billy.

"I kin smell it now real strong," declared Jimmy, as they drew closer to the pale blue curl of smoke that arose from the underbrush.

"Look, Jimmy, there are four or five men down there. One of 'em up the creek a little has got a shotgun over his shoulder. I hope they won't take us for squirrels or possums or nothin'."

The boys were now directly opposite the mysterious fire, peering at it through the branches of the huge sycamore tree that had interrupted the fall of its brother across the stream and even now was holding the fallen giant in its branches.

"Yonder's old Uncle Jimmy-jawed Jupiter," said Billy. "I can always tell him by his being so little and bent over, and then he always wears the blue coat with brass buttons. I'm real fond of old Uncle Jupiter."

"Me too, but that's mo'n Aunt Cindy an' Miss Minerva are. What you reckon those men are after down yonder, Billy?" queried Jimmy.

"Search me! Two of 'em are white. Look! Up the stream — kinder creepin' along easy. Jim Garner, there's a whole bunch of men — all of 'em white an' the one in front has a star on his coat. I can see it a shinin' in the sun.

"Holy Moses, Jimmy, do you know what this is a goin' on right under our noses?" and Billy grabbed his chum by the arm and shook him excitedly. "It's a lot of men with a still, making corn booze and the prohibition officers are gonter git 'em. That man with the star is a p'liceman."

Jimmy was almost bursting with excitement and leaned so far over the bluff that Billy held on to his legs to keep him from

rolling over into the midst of the moonshiners.

"Gee, Jim, I don't want 'em to ketch Uncle Jimmy-jawed Jupiter. He ain't doin' no harm, I'm sure. I wisht I could warn him somehow or other."

A shot rang out — another and another. In an instant the little valley was full of the noise of pistol shots and shouts of men, and above all an incessant screaming, so high and shrill the boys were sure it came from a woman.

"Somebody's got hit," said Billy solemnly, his breath coming in a sob.

The prohibition officers had long suspected a gang of moonshiners to be at work somewhere in the neighborhood. They had laid their snares craftily and silently and had caught them red handed, as it were. There was no escaping the officers. They swarmed from up-stream and down-stream,

all of them armed and determined. Having overcome the outposts, it was an easy matter to capture the men who were even then busily engaged in illicit distilling.

"I know they oughtn'ter make the stuff," said Billy, trying to control the sobs that would come. "It's against the law an' Maje says it's mighty poor liquor besides, but I can't bear to see 'em get caught. I wisht I coulder warned Uncle Jupiter. Can you make him out, Jim? They's such a lot of men down there now I can't tell Uncle Jimmy-jawed Jupiter from the others."

"No, I can't see him," said Jimmy. "But look, they've handcuffed the men! I wisht I was a p'liceman. They all time have 'citement."

"Now they're bustin' up the still an' pourin' out the mash. I reckon the catfish in the river'll have a party an' all get

drunk," laughed Billy. "But," he added solemnly, "catfish make me think 'bout Uncle Jupiter, 'cause he's sech a lucky fisherman, an' I can't see him down yonder."

The noise in the valley had subsided. The screaming, which turned out to have come from a negro youth and not a woman, suddenly ceased when the boy realized that he was not shot at all and that the blood on his bare leg had been drawn by a bramble.

"Have we got 'em all?" asked the officer in charge of the raiding party. "I am sure I saw another — a little old nigger in a long coat."

"We've got enough," said one of the men.

"Well, we want them all, so some of you start in and beat the bushes. We'll wait for you on the pike."

"Oh, I'm so 'fraid they'll git him," said

Billy. "I reckon Uncle Jupiter's scrooched down in the bushes somewheres. He's so old to get 'rested an' even Aunt Cindy says they ain't never been any harm in him, all his born days."

Breathlessly the boys watched the search. Sometimes the men were concealed from their view by the thick alders and tangled vines and again they would come in plain view. With long sticks they literally beat the bushes. With every whack Billy shuddered.

"It might be Uncle Jupiter's back," he sobbed. "He's always been mighty good to me. He can't help being no 'count. He's so little an' scroochy."

"Well, it'll be money in his pants if he's littler an' scroochier than ever," said Jimmy.

Be it noted that Jimmy respected Billy's tears. He realized they were manly tears

and might have been shed by Stonewall Jackson or Robert E. Lee.

"They haven't found him yet, anyhow," and Billy gave a sigh of relief, as the men disappeared down the muddy banks of the stream. "Uncle Jupiter's powerful slick. He mighter got away. He's always kinder active, a gettin' around Aunt Cindy all these years."

"Say, Billy, what's that in that tree — that one what's a holdin' up the other one? It looks like a coon or possum or something."

Billy looked where Jimmy pointed. Up in the leafy bower of two trees sat Uncle Jupiter. He had run like a monkey up the fallen tree and, in the smoke and confusion of the raid, had accomplished this climbing feat unseen by moonshiners or raiders. Like a monkey he sat huddled in a crotch where the two trees came together

and Billy couldn't help laughing when he noticed how much like a caudal appendage the blue tail of his old coachman's coat looked, hanging down from the branch of the sycamore. Clasped close in his arms was a brown jug.

"Hist! Uncle Jupiter! They've gone!" Billy whispered. The old man was visibly startled. He turned on his perch and peered through the leaves at the two boys on the cliff near his friendly trees.

"It's jes' me, Billy! Billy an' Jimmy! You needn't be scairt of us. The officers have all gone. I reckon they're over to the pike by this time. You kin come down."

"Is you sho'?" faltered the old man. "Case I's powful compertable up hyar."

"Yes, I'm sure," laughed Billy. "Can you get down?"

"I reckon what comes up mus' git

down," chuckled Uncle Jupiter. "I don' wanter bus' my 'lasses jug though."

Slowly and carefully he began his descent. The old man was remarkably

nimble. He and his 'lasses jug reached the ground safely and then, with astonishing agility, he scrambled up the steep cliff and soon joined the two boys.

"Howcum you two air hyar?" he asked of his young friends.

"We were jes' foolin' around thinkin' about goin' in wadin'," said Billy, "when the p'lice came. I was mighty scairt you were gonter get took, Uncle Jupiter."

"Who, me? I ain't been doin' nothin' ter git took fer. I wa' jes' a comin' from the sto' wha' I been ter fotch some 'lasses fer my Cindy. I comed by thisaway ter see how some catfish lines I done sot wa' a gittin' 'long an' I struck up th'ough the valley fer a short cut home whin I run in on that thar mess er sinners. No sir! I ain't scairt er no revenooers."

"What made you run up the tree then?" asked Billy with a twinkle in his eye.

"'Case I wa' scairt some er them there wil' shots mought hit my 'lasses jug. Cindy air pow'ful fond er sorghum an' th' ain't

nobody what keeps so good as Biddle Brothers over ter Hillsville."

"I reckon we won't go paddlin' this morning, Jimmy," said Billy. "We might just as well go on with Uncle Jupiter."

"The water would be right comfortin' I 'low," said the old man. "If I didn't have ter be gittin' along ter holp Cindy I'd stop an' wiggle my own toes in the water 'long side er you."

"It is gettin' late," put in Jimmy. "My tummy keeps right good time an' I'm bettin' it's mos' dinner time, so come along."

The old man continued to picture the delights of wading. He declared the sun, which he considered a much more reliable timepiece than Jimmy's stomach, gave no evidence of getting near dinner time. It was plain to see that he did not want the boys' company on the way home.

"I never seed anything lak the young folks these days," he muttered. "Now, Billy, I mind how yo' paw never let a day go by he didn't have his foots an' sometimes his whole pusson in the water. But he wa' a moughty mannish chil' from the fust beginnin'."

"We'll go this afternoon," smiled Billy.

"Yo' paw'd go mawnin' an' evenin'," insisted Uncle Jupiter.

"So will we to-morrow."

"He nebber waited fer nex' time. He wa' that mannish an' up'n doin'."

The boys nudged each other and followed the disgruntled old man as he went along the cliff with his molasses jug clutched lovingly to his bosom.

"That jug's mighty heavy for you, Uncle Jupiter. You'd better let Jimmy an' me lug it for you. We can carry it on a

stick between us jes' as easy," urged Billy.

"No, sir! I ain't a trustin this sorghum er my Cindy's ter no lil squeamy boys. 'Sides 'taint ter say so heavy."

When they reached the fence Billy and Jimmy began climbing it to cross the meadow to the great house. Uncle Jupiter paused a moment and then scratched his head ruminatingly.

"Now bless Bob, ef I ain't disremembered 'bout a erran' I had fer Mr. Hopkins. I'll haveter part comp'ny here an' git over to'ds the road." He bade the boys good-bye and shambled on, taking the path by the fence — the one down which the boys had run after exploring the depths of the hollow tree.

CHAPTER XV

BILLY SITS IN JUDGMENT

"I WONDER what that ol' coon is up to," mused Jimmy, as Uncle Jupiter ambled off.

"I ain't sure but that jug had the funniest smellin' 'lasses in it I ever smelt," declared Billy.

"Yes, an' it went google-google too, when ol' Uncle Jupiter was walkin' over rough ground, an' everybody knows 'lasses don't go google-google. Say, Billy, my stummick was fast jes' now. I don't believe it is anywhere near dinner time. Let's follow Uncle Jupiter a piece."

"All right!" agreed Billy, and quickly the boys, keeping close to the fence, followed the old man.

"Look, he didn't go through the gap!"

Jimmy exclaimed. "Gee, Bill, he's makin' for the devil tree. I'm a wonderin' if it ain't pretty nigh dinner time after all. I feel powerful empty."

Billy laughed. "Say, Jimmy, th' ain't a bit of use in going on. I have worked out where Uncle Jupiter is bound for an' what he's up to. That google-google 'lasses is gonter end in the hollow tree an' I betcher Uncle Jimmy-jawed Jupiter is gonter have a ten dollar bill in his pants before so very long. Don't you remember the table of measurements we learned in 'rithmetic: Two pints make a quart, four quarts make a gallon? And don't you remember how gallon was 'breviated an' looked like gal? That note in the tree meant a gallon of moonshine an' I reckon it costs just about ten bucks. That's the reason Uncle Jupiter was so anxious to save it from the wreck.

"I betcher poor Aunt Cindy'll never get

her sorghum. I wisht we could hang around an' see who gets the gal. Uncle Jupiter thinks he's mighty slick, don't he?"

"Yes, an' I never did believe in no devil's tree an' door to the bad place. I always did think it was jes' foolishness. Say, Bill, ain't we the best detecertives they is?"

"Jimmy, I reckon we'd better not tell anybody about the things we been a seein' this mornin' — not 'til Maje comes, anyhow."

"Not Lina an' Frances? I'd sho' like to make them wisht they was boys an' hadn't gone a callin' on fool womens with they heads on one side."

"We might tell Lina an' Frances an' Aunt Minerva 'bout the raid, but I'm thinkin' 'bout the hollow tree an' the ten bucks an' the one gal and the devil's head for signature. Ol' Uncle Jupiter is liable

to get in pretty bad if it gets out 'bout him.

"You know what the Maje says?" Billy held up one forefinger. "I know — that makes one." He held up the other forefinger close to its mate. "An' you know an' that makes 'leven. Now I think you'n me might kinder scare Uncle Jupiter up a little an' somehow we might save him an' make him stop his badness — or make him be a leetle more careful, anyways."

"All right! We can tell 'bout the shootin' an' the still an' not breathe a word 'bout the rest," said Jimmy, reluctantly.

"Promise?" demanded Billy.

"Sure, I promise!" retorted Master Garner.

Jimmy's stomach was keeping pretty good time. Aunt Cindy was dishing up dinner when the boys arrived at the house and they had to hurry with their sketchy ablutions not to be late. The little girls

had returned from their visit and were bubbling over with enthusiasm about Mrs. Hopkins' magic house and all her trick furnishings. As they took their places at the table Lina began:

"The most be-uuu-ti-ful pictures, all made out of bark and cotton and moss and chewing gum! I'm going to make one for my mother just as soon as I can."

"And I'm gonter begin saving buttons this minute," declared Frances. "There are some real pretty ones on my nex' bes' dress and I'm gonter hurry up and wear it out. I'd just love to have strings and strings of buttons in our parlor."

Miss Minerva had strong doubts as to Mrs. Black's approving such decorations, as that lady prided herself on her taste in interior decorations, but she listened to the children's talk without comment.

"I betcher don't know what Billy'n me's

been doin'," said Jimmy. "We've been a — "

"And the most adorable chair," went on Lina. "A chair that looked just like any other chair 'cept it played tunes. It nearly scared me to death at first."

"Humph! If a chair scared you, I wonder what you'd a done if guns as loud as cannons kep' a goin' off all 'roun' you — an — " Jimmy raised his voice to a shout.

"The tune wasn't like victrola tunes 'zactly — more like a kind of hand organ with a monkey."

"Monkey much! If you c'd see Uncle Jimmy-jawed Jupiter clumb a tree — " but a violent kick under the table from Billy silenced the eager Jimmy for a moment.

"And the spatter work was wonderful." Frances took up the tale. "I'm gonter buy a fine tooth comb right off — "

"I reckon those p'licemen would a been

glad if they'd a had a fine tooth comb when they were a huntin' — " Again Billy kicked Jimmy warningly.

" P'licemen! What p'licemen? " asked Frances, who became aware that Jimmy was endeavoring to tell something. If there were policemen in the story it might be even more interesting than buttons on a string or musical chairs.

With a look of determination in his eye and a vicious dig under the table with his bare foot on Jimmy's fat leg, Billy took up the tale of the raid on the moonshiners and, with skillful reservations, told enough to thrill his audience. Lina occasionally put in a word about heart shaped cookies and imitation spider webs and perennial dewdrops but nobody was interested in such things as Billy's fiery narration continued.

Aunt Cindy stopped for a moment on her way to the kitchen and demanded:

"Air you come acrosst that ol' Jupiter this mawnin'?"

"Uncle Jimmy-jawed Jupiter?" asked Billy innocently.

"What other is thar? Air you seed him?"

"Why — er — yes — er — Jimmy and me saw Uncle Jupiter. He said he had a errand over to Mr. Hopkinses."

"Humph! He better be gittin' a arrand over ter his own cabin an' keep hisse'f thar," said Aunt Cindy. "A pusson what ain't never done a lick er wuck in his whole life would be right hard up if he had ter take his turn a wuckin with the chain gang. It mought be good fer him though. If that ol' nigger had ter go ter wuck and pervide good roads fer the state it would be the fust pervidin' he ever done in his life. I been coupled up with that ol' man s'long I disremember how many years, but

he ain't never pervided nothin' fer me yit."

Aunt Cindy was evidently relieved that her unworthy spouse was not mixed up in the raid.

"Well, he was busy providin' sorghum for you this mornin'," put in Jimmy. "He had a jug of 'lasses when we met him. Billy Hill, stop a diggin' yo' toenails in my meat."

Billy gave a sigh of resignation. There was no use in trying to curb Jimmy's tongue.

"Oh, did he?" and Aunt Cindy smiled broadly. "I been arfter him ter git me some country sorghum but I ain't put no trus' in his 'membrance."

After dinner Billy attempted to admonish Jimmy for his indiscreet talk, but to no great purpose.

"Aw, shucks, Billy Hill, you all time

think you're so slick! I ain't give a thing away."

"Not hardly! Whatcher had to bring in the jug for?"

"Why, I told about that on purpose, 'cause Aunt Cindy's all time rippin' Uncle Jupiter so hard. She come around as soon as I mentioned 'lasses. I all time like to see husbands an' wives happy an' lovin'." Jimmy's countenance registered a smug and satisfied expression.

At that moment they saw Uncle Jupiter, creeping across the back yard. He was wont to have an urge to see his dear Cindy at dinner time.

"Let's go see what he says," suggested Billy.

Aunt Cindy greeted her husband with an ominous silence.

"How you comin' on, Cindy?" he asked insinuatingly.

"Slow! Comin' on slow!"

"I 'lowed I'd come up ter the gret house ter see if you ain't got some wuck

you'd like ter have me holp you out with," he suggested meekly.

"Whar's my 'lasses?" she asked sternly.

"What 'lasses, Cindy?"

"My sorghum!"

"I reckon I ain't hearn aright, Cindy."

"Them boys come back with a tale 'bout you gittin' a jug er country sorghum fer me."

"Oh, well now I was 'lowin' ter s'prise you with that air sorghum. I 'lowed Billy an' that there Jimmy wouldn't a spilt my s'prise, but chilluns is funny folkses."

"Well, s'long as the s'prise is over, whar air my 'lasses?"

The old man looked at his wife with sad monkey eyes. He hesitated a moment and then pulled from the pocket of his long coat tail a huge red bandanna handkerchief with which he slowly and solemnly wiped his brow. The meeting of husband and wife was being held under the vine-covered shed that connected the outside summer kitchen with the house. The boys hid behind the latticed sides of the shed and peered in at old Uncle Jupiter. Very

sad and aged he looked. He sank on a bench and looked appealingly up at Aunt Cindy.

"Well now, Cindy, I air slow ter speak 'case I air propelled ter han' you po' news. Sence them boys air got befo' han' an' with they smartaleckness air promulgated that I done made a trip ter fotch you a little sweetness fer yo' pone the needcessity air arise fer me ter pronounce that I done drapt the jug an' broke it inter many fractions. I'm a gonter git you anudder jug full, though, Cindy, so don' you take on too sad."

All Aunt Cindy said was: "Humph!" She went to the kitchen, where she made a great rattling of pots and pans. Uncle Jupiter looked sadly after her. Was she going to give him some dinner or was she not?

Billy and Jimmy entered the shed and

seated themselves on the bench by the old man.

"Yo' paw never would a spilt a s'prise the way you done did," he declared, a hint of severity in his voice. "Whe'fo' you done tol' Cindy I wa' a fetchin' her some 'lasses, Billy?"

Billy laughed. He had no idea of telling Uncle Jupiter that Jimmy had been the one to spill the beans, not wishing to make his best friend unpopular on the plantation. His own popularity was too well established to be diminished by such a small thing as spoiling the surprise of a jug of sorghum. He looked keenly at the old man.

Uncle Jupiter's eyes shifted uneasily and fell before Billy's direct and merry gaze. He gave a perceptible start and then quickly tried to conceal from Billy that something was disturbing him.

On the clay that formed the floor of the shed, there lay a ten dollar bill. It had been put in the pocket of the blue coat and had evidently been pulled out with the bandanna handkerchief. Jupiter realized that Billy saw what he saw and all he could do was put on a pitiful expression and look pleadingly at the young master. Billy, with his bare toes, deftly caught up the bill and drew it gently under the bench.

Jimmy saw nothing of this. The truth of the matter was that Jimmy was sleepy. The broken rest of the night before, followed by the funeral of Mr. Bonyman and then a walk in the sun and the excitement of the raid on the moonshiners, topped off by a very satisfying dinner, was enough to make anybody drowsy. Jimmy's head wabbled and then sought rest against the lattice and soon soft snores gave evidence that the land of Nod had claimed him.

Billy took from Uncle Jupiter's unresisting hand the hickory stick the old man always carried and with it he drew the cryptic sign of the triangle, such as he had seen in the hollow tree.

"Whatcher — whe'fo' you — ? — Oh, Billy, don' let on ter Cindy. Howcum you — ?" Tears, real tears, were rolling down the wrinkled brown cheeks.

"Now see here, Uncle Jupiter, I know all about the hollow tree and what became of the 'lasses jug, which made a mighty funny sound for 'lasses, and had a mighty funny smell for 'lasses. I know right well where you got the ten bucks I've got scrooched up in my toes."

"Now, Billy," quavered the old man, "ain't you'n me been frien's sence you wa'n't mo'n bawn? Don't you go a tellin' on yo' ol' pardner."

"I'm no tell-tale-tit, Uncle Jupiter, and

you know it, but I'm gonter hand you a little advice right now. I was gonter tell the Major about your goin's-on, but I ain't even gonter tell him if you see fit to take my advice."

"What is it, Billy?"

"It's this. You quit foolin' around those bum whisky stills, an' you be mighty careful not to sell any more liquor and don't drink any either. You keep away from that devil's tree."

"Yassah! An' you's sho' gonter han' me my lil bill long with that ere good 'vice?"

"Of course I am. I don't want it, but I'm gonter tell you what you are going to do with it. You are gonter get Aunt Cindy a real jug of real sorghum, and what's more, you're gonter get her a nice new dress over to the store. I betcher you never gave Aunt Cindy a dress in all your

life. Did you, Uncle Jupiter?"

"Well now I disremembers."

"I betcher Aunt Cindy remembers whether you ever did or not. Let's ask her."

"No, no, Billy! Don't git Cindy started. She's a awful easy pusson ter git started an' moughty hard ter put the brakes on. I'll do what you say. I'll git the sorghum an' what's mo', I'll git the goods fer a dress, if it do take a pow'ful lot to kiver up Cindy. I reckon I'll git it red."

Billy raised his bare foot to a level with the old man's face and slowly released the clutch on the ten dollar bill.

Uncle Jupiter grasped it tremulously and tied it securely in the corner of his handkerchief.

"Billy, you sho' do 'min' me of yo' paw. He wa' that mannish."

CHAPTER XVI

ON THE MISSISSIPPI

HE long summer days sped happily by on the old plantation. Billy and his guests were busy with their ever-changing games from morning to night. Major Estes so arranged his business that he could spend all of his time with his family.

Miss Minerva came to look upon the plantation as a second home. Where her husband and child and nephew abode was home to her. She even smiled kindly on the visitors. Jimmy certainly was good natured and not such a handful as she had feared he would be. Lina was a deft little housewife and often assisted her hostess in such tasks as dusting after Oleander Magnolia Althea, who was being trained as

housemaid by Aunt Cindy, but who declared her pupil "jes' stood in the middle of the room an' blowed the dus' an' never did nothin' with a dus' rag mo'n slappin'." Frances remained the favorite of Miss Minerva, for the little girl was upstanding and practical, and always a general in directing forces, whether of children or circumstances.

At last the promised trip on the steamboat was to be realized. The children were rather sad that the river jaunt and "big meetin'" week coincided; but Major and Mrs. Estes had talked it over and decided that the week of the negroes' protracted meeting was an excellent time in which to take the children away from the plantation.

"Even Aunt Cindy loses her head then," said Miss Minerva. "Already she is deeply engrossed in making a wonderful red dress for herself of the goods her wicked old hus-

band bought for her. Where he got the money with which to purchase the dress I am sure I cannot see. He never does any work."

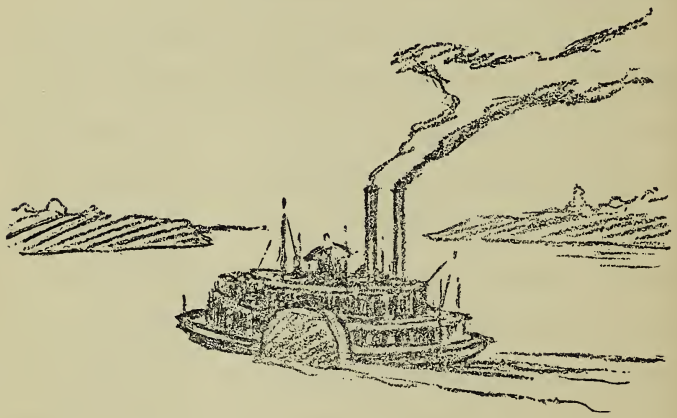
"Uncle Jupiter is a mighty fisherman," suggested the genial Major.

"Nothing but catfish," sniffed Miss Minerva, "and I am sure it would take a great many catfish to cover Aunt Cindy."

The great day finally arrived when the steamboat, having been duly warned by letter, turned itself around in midstream and, with mighty blasts of its whistle and much belching of smoke and ringing of bells and shocking language from the mate and great churning of the muddy Mississippi, landed at the little wharf where the excited party awaited to embark.

"It's the Molly Darling!" cried Billy. "She's the fastest boat on the Mississip', so Mose says, 'ceptin' of course the big

N'Orleans boats. Now they're gonter let down the gangplank. Yonder's the mud clerk. They call him that 'cause he haster stand out in the mud an' keep track er the hogs and sheep and cotton bales and things



so's nobody'll steal them. He's got a mean job, 'cept'n the mate ain't 'lowed to cuss him. When he gets cussed at the cap'n haster do it."

There was nothing for the mud clerk to do at this landing, as the freight was all

human and could walk the gangplank without the aid of the grinning roustabouts who had been aroused from their slumbers by the noise of the landing.

The nature of the roustabout is to sleep when there is no work or eating to be done. He lies down in any convenient spot, no matter how hard, and sleeps the hours away. At some landings the work of loading or unloading is hard and heavy and he accepts it cheerfully as part of life, even when he must labor far into the night. No doubt the remembrance of the long, undisturbed naps comforts him and the prospect of other delightful siestas cheers him on as he lifts great burdens and staggers along the gangplank.

The children were delighted with their staterooms. Lina rather wanted to begin immediately her favorite game of playing house, as the bunks offered such delightful

possibilities of having upstairs and down, but Frances laughed her out of it and she reluctantly followed her chum on deck.

The Molly Darling was an excursion boat on the upper and middle decks and a deeply laden freight boat below. On the middle deck a little band of earnest musicians tooted popular tunes every time the steamboat landed and again when it shoved off. On the lower deck there was the noise of cackling hens and crowing roosters, squealing pigs, the pitiful bleating of sheep and the lowing of cattle and the constant wail of calves that were soon to be converted into veal cutlets.

In the saloon a girl banged steadily on the piano — perhaps not the same girl of which Billy had spoken, but one just as forceful. This one had on a blue sash. Her foot was always on the loud pedal and so masterly was her execution that Miss

Minerva thought it was a duet, not believing one pair of hands could possibly have extracted so much sound from one piano.

"I have always loved steamboat travel. It is so restful," said the Major.

Miss Minerva looked at her husband keenly to see whether or not he was joking. There was no twinkle in his eye, but a far-away expression as though he might be seeing visions.

"Restful?" queried Miss Minerva.

"Oh, you mean all these noises! You get used to them in no time. They are just part of steamboat life — part of the tune. The swash of the paddles as they churn up the water will soon be the only thing you will notice and that will put you to sleep. For sleeping, day or night, give me a Mississippi steamboat!" exclaimed the Major.

Miss Minerva smiled. She was perfectly willing to give her Joseph a steamboat, or

anything else he wanted. He seemed so like a nice, roly poly boy as he proudly showed her around the spotless deck and placed chairs in exactly the right nook — shady and far enough from the busy little band somewhat to soften the brassy blare.

"You needn't worry about the children now, my dear," said the Major. "Nothing can happen to them on a steamboat. Nothing ever has happened to children on steamboats."

Miss Minerva had her private opinion as to Billy and Jimmy and the possibility that they would succeed in getting into trouble, but she did not give voice to her fears. Already the peace of which the Major had spoken had begun to steal over her. A pleasing drowsiness crept into her being and, although the band continued to burst into music as the boat zigzagged its way along the river, and the young lady in

the blue sash had no mercy on the poor piano, Miss Minerva, for the thousandth time since her marriage, like the dutiful wife in the fairy tale, decided that "the old man always knows best." Life on a steamboat was restful after all.

The children could not decide what to do first. The upper deck offered various delights. They succeeded in routing out several courting couples, who had taken refuge in the friendly shade of the life boats. They spent some breathless moments watching the pilot in his wonderful little glass house, controlling the steamboat by a mere twist of the wrist.

"I wisht we could go up in the pilot house," sighed Billy. "Cap'n Shirley says he can't 'low us up there, 'cause we might bother the pilot. I'd ruther to grow up into a pilot than anything in the world — even a judge."

"I'd ruther be a mate any day," said Jimmy. "Mates kin cuss all they wanter 'thout nobody tellin' 'em to stop. The mate on this boat's the cussines' mate on the river. I betcher I can beat him by the time I put on long pants."

"Foolishness!" declared Frances. "I could beat him now if I had a mind to. I never saw anybody so proud of himself 'cause of pants as you, Jimmy Garner."

"Well, didn't George Washington say the coat doesn't make the man and don't you reckon he meant by that that the pants do make him? If he hadn't meant it he would a said so, because he always told the truth."

"Pooh!" said Frances. "I reckon you think George Washington meant a short coat doesn't make a man but long pants do. Well, I'll tell you one thing — pants wouldn't make a man out of me and thank

goodness they wouldn't. I'm glad enough I'm a woman and have sense enough to talk, without having to cuss to make people mind me. Those roustabouts are so used to being cussed they don't notice it any more and I betcher if the old mate would stop swearing one time and just say please to them they'd do what he wants a lot quicker."

The children were leaning over the railing on the upper deck, watching the waves that followed in the wake of the vessel. At Frances's remarks concerning the methods of mates there was a short laugh. They turned to find Captain Shirley standing behind them.

"Yes, I'd like to see what the roustabouts would do if Jinks, the first mate, would say please instead of swearing," chuckled the captain. "I reckon they'd fall in the water. Bless you! Jinks is as kind

a mate as you'd find on the river. The roustabouts all like him."

"Do they like to get hit in the head with a hickory stick?" asked Josephine wonderingly. "I saw one get hit and he just grinned and laughed."

"Sure they like it! If they didn't they wouldn't behave so that Jinks would be called on to knock them down."

Captain Shirley then told them wonderful tales of steamboat life of the olden times, when there were floating palaces plying from Cincinnati or St. Louis to New Orleans and how gay the life was on those boats, with music and dancing and carousing far into the night.

The children did not see how anything could possibly be gayer than the Molly Darling. They listened with amazement to the captain's description of the steamboat races, when two huge vessels under full

steam and with all lights burning would rush at breakneck speed down the Mississippi.

"They usually raced at night," he continued. "A daytime race was no fun at all. The boats would be close enough to hear the music and shouts of the rival. I remember well how Mark Twain loved a race."

"Oh, do you know him?" asked Billy in awe and wonder. "I've read 'Tom Sawyer' and 'Huckleberry Finn.' I'd rather know Mark Twain than Shakespeare."

"Know Sam Clemens! I should say I did," said the captain, "and a fine fellow he was. It's a pity he ever gave up steamboating. That writing business killed him. Too much hanging over a desk is bad for the health."

CHAPTER XVII

JOSEPHINE'S PET PIG

APTAIN SHIRLEY'S absorbing narrative was cut short when the Molly Darling whistled for a landing at a small village. The band played lustily as they neared the shore. As the boat tied up to the wharf a large family of squealing pigs refused to leave their comfortable quarters and walk the plank to board the boat. In consequence, the roustabouts, with loud guffaws, resorted to force and catching the resisting animals by their hind legs swung them over their shoulders and bore them safely to the pen awaiting them on the lower deck.

As the boat pushed out again the band played cheerily.

"A lot of music for nothin' but pigs!" remarked Billy.

The tune was finished and the musicians relapsed into a comatose state. The next landing was ten miles farther down stream and on the other side of the river, so there was time enough for the band, as well as the roustabouts, to have a good nap.

Came a sudden noise of shouting, ringing of bells, blowing of whistle and shrill squealing of pigs. The Molly Darling turned in midstream and churned back to shore. A pig was overboard and swimming desperately for his happy home.

Instructed to play a gay tune at every landing, the band awoke and began to toot forth "When Johnny Comes Marching Home." The landing was made and a half dozen roustabouts sprang ashore and plunged into the thicket after the little black pig with a natural curl in his tail.

The children were much excited over the escape and chase.

"That ol' pig oughter be proud to have a big steamboat a runnin' after her," declared Jimmy, "an' music playin' an' all."

"But I hope they won't catch it," cried Josephine. "Poor little piggy wiggy! If they do catch her, Daddy, what will they do with her?"

The Major hesitated to answer, knowing as he did what a tender heart his little daughter possessed, but Jimmy hesitated at nothing.

"Cut her throat an' then skin her an' then cut her up into hams an' chops an' chitterlin's," he declared relentlessly.

That sweet little piggy! Oh, oh, oh! I hope they won't get her. I can't live if they get her," and the child began to weep pitifully. "She's so brave and sweet," she sobbed. "Daddy, if they get her please

don't let them cut her up." She looked trustingly into the perplexed face of her father and caught him by the hand. "You won't let 'em kill my little piggy wiggy, will you Daddy?"

"Oh, is it your pig? I didn't know you had a pig."

"Oh, yes, she's mine," said Josephine. "I been ownin' her ever since she squealed so pretty an' jumped into the river. I ain't paid for her yet, but I knowed all the time that there wouldn't be any trouble 'bout that 'cause my daddy is the bestes' man 'bout payin' for pigs. If she gets away an' those ol' men can't catch her you won't have to pay. I let my piggies run away any time an' she knows it, but if they do catch her you'll go down an' say to the men, 'Thank you kindly for a catchin' my little daughter's piggy wiggy,' an' then you'll turn to the captain an' you'll say, 'How

much do I owe you on account for that pretty little black piggy with the curl in his tail?' an' then everybody will know that she is my own baby."

The Major laughed and then looked serious. When Josephine set both heart and mind on something it was difficult to circumvent her.

"But what would you do with a black pig with a curly tail?" he asked.

"Do with it! Why, Daddy, I'd hug it an' kiss it an' name it Mary Pickford, 'cause she's got curls too."

"But what would your mother say?"

"She wouldn't say anything 'til it was too late, 'cause Minerva ain't a gonter know a thing about my piggy 'til it's too late to stop it from bein' mine. You jes' talk pretty to the captain an' I'll manage Minerva, Daddy. You don't want me to be a cryin' my eyes out all the time we're on

the boat, do you, Daddy? If I keep a thinkin' 'bout their cuttin' Mary Pickford's throat an' pullin' the skin off'n her an' carvin' pork chops an' things off'n her I am never goin' to stop cryin'," and Josephine wept afresh.

"There, there! Please don't cry, honey," begged the tender hearted father. "I'll do my best. Maybe they won't catch Mary Pickford after all."

But catch her they did after a thorough beating of the bushes, and the fair Mary was brought back squealing lustily. Pork was high, but the Major was determined that his dear child should not cry her pretty eyes out all because of the price of a live pig. The mud clerk must be interviewed and arrangements must be made to own the pig with the natural curl.

"The litter was shipped by Jim Haskins and he will be glad to get rid of one with-

out the commission merchant getting his finger in the pie," declared the mud clerk. "I'll see to it for you, Major Estes. The pig is yours."

The transaction was kept a dark secret from Miss Minerva for some time and then it was so adroitly broken that she was forced to accept the addition to the family with a good grace. Josephine had been persuaded to leave her dog, Flumpy, in the care of Sam Lamb when they came to the plantation for the summer and the Major intimated that Mary Pickford was bought as a reward of merit and since she must remain on the plantation and would of necessity live in a pen and not the parlor she would really be no annoyance at all. So Josephine's tears were dried and for the rest of the voyage the feeding of her pig was of paramount importance.

Billy's glowing account of meals on the

steamboat had filled the children with eager anticipation. When the gong sounded for the first supper aboard they were ready and eager for the feast. It was all as he had said — napkins folded into lilies and chrysanthemums and stuck in the glasses, knives and forks stacked like rifles at each place, and white coated waiters executing marvelous juggling feats with trays of steaming food. There were thin, very well done steaks, highly seasoned and tasty, fried apples and fried potatoes, and hot rolls, and then every kind of pie known to mortal man.

The children settled themselves with sighs of contentment.

"I'm gonter start eating far from the table so's I won't touch too soon," said Billy. "Gee, I'm glad I've got so much room in me!"

The Molly Darling had a long, narrow

table, stretching almost the entire length of the saloon. Hungry passengers slid to their seats and commenced operations in short order. There were all kinds of people at the table — rich planters from down the river, bridal couples from all parts, families intent on moving from one mud bank to another, commercial travelers bound for the towns and villages not reached by rail, a vaudeville company composed of song and dance artists, a lady with trained cockatoos, and a Japanese juggler.

There were other persons whom it was difficult to classify. Among the latter was a man with a thick, red moustache, so long the ends either floated in the breezes or rested confidingly on the lapels of his purple and green checked coat.

" I'm gonter grow a moustache like that when I put on long pants," declared Jimmy, fascinated by the flashy gentleman, who

took a seat exactly opposite the Major's party.

All eyes were turned on the man with the red moustache, but the business of eat-

ing was all that concerned that person. He called a waiter in loud, commanding tones.

"Here, Bill, bring me something of everything in the galley, and be quick about it!" He then deliberately twisted his moustache into tight ropes and looped the

ends behind his ears, clearing the decks for action, as it were.

Lina choked and must be pounded on the back by Frances, who was glad of an outlet for her own suppressed emotion. The Major grew purple in his endeavor not to explode with mirth. The boys made no attempt to keep back the giggles. Even Miss Minerva smiled broadly.

It was a relief, in a way, when Josephine leaned across the table and in a sweet, confiding voice said pleadingly:

"Oh, mister, please do it some more!"

The trip was a great success. Every hour of every day something delightful happened and the nights were filled with soothing melodies of waters churned up by the paddle wheels. Just as the Major had said, the other noises on the boat were swallowed up by the rhythmic splashings of the paddles.

The journey lasted less than a week, but it seemed to the children that they had always lived on the Molly Darling. It was an experience to be remembered by them with joy and gratitude all their lives.

"Maje, I wonder if you know how — how — much we think of you," said Billy haltingly, as the steamboat began its noisy preparation for landing at the plantation. "Sometimes I must write you a letter to tell you, 'cause I can't talk about it."

The Major shook hands with Billy solemnly. He longed to give him a good hug, but knew Billy would prefer a handshake.

"Thank you, Billy," was all he said, but old man and little boy had no need of further words. They understood.

The steamboat whistle was heard on the plantation and all of the colored children who could get there were waiting at the landing to receive the travelers.

"Hi, Billy! Hi, Jimmy! Hi, Miss Lina an' Frances! Hi, lil Miss Jo!" cried Wilkes Booth Lincoln, as his friends disembarked.

"Hi, Wilkes Booth Lincoln! I wisht you'd a been along. How's all?"

"All's fine! Say, Billy, I wisht you'd a been to big meetin'. You never seed sech carryin's on sence you'n me's been bawn. Uncle Jimmy-jawed Jupiter got 'ligion all over when they sang 'Toll de Bell,' an' he moaned an' groaned like he had a pain. An' Aunt Cindy wa' there all drest in a big red dress, lookin' pow'ful lak a burnin' bush an' they do say Uncle Jupiter made her a present gift of that dress an' she wa' moughty puffed up 'bout it.

"Anyhow, when Uncle Jupiter went sidlin' up to the moaner's binch an' Gran'-mammy got ter shoutin', Aunt Cindy got ter jumpin' up'n down in the aisle an'

befo' you knowed it she wa' a rollin' on the flo'. The mimbers give her room an' she rolled lak a bar'l. When she got to the do' she jumped up an', Billy, that ol' 'ooman began to tu'n somersets to beat the band. She's suppler than she was that time I seen her cuttin' up jack, befo' I took to sleepin' over the wood house. I tell you, Billy, Mount Sinai Tabernickle ain't never had sech a big meetin' sence Noah landed there."

Billy sighed.

"I wisht I had been born twinses and I coulder been two places at one time. I wouldn't er missed the steamboat trip for anything but I would er liked to see Aunt Cindy doing her turn."

THE END.